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COMPUTERWORLD

JUNE 28, 1999

THE 100 BEST PLACES TO WORK IN IT

The staff of
Lincoln Electric
in Cleveland
celebrate their
No. 1 ranking



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Senior Editor

David Weldon

Project Editor

Amy Malloy

Managing Editor

Pat Hyde

Designer

Dan Beard

Art Director

Mary Beth Welch

Research Director

Lorraine Cosgrove

Corporate Librarian

Laura Hunt

Research Consultant

Robert C. Fink, associate professor,
Stonehill College, Easton, Mass.

Contributing Editor

Joyce Chutchian-Ferranti

Writers

Steve Alexander

Mary Brandel

Tom Duffy

Fawn Fitter

Cheryl Gerber

Leslie Goff

Alice Lesch Kelly

Alice LaPlante

Holly Hubbard Preston

Sharon Watson

Joanie Wexler

Copy editors

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Computerworld Editor in Chief

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The 100 Best Places To Work in IT

From the editor

There has probably never been a more important year for managers to care about what are the "Best Places to Work in IT" and what makes those companies special.

The supply-and-demand-gap for skilled information technology workers remains vast, with little sign of easing in the next few years. Recruiting and retention continue to be the biggest challenges facing the IT manager. And companies are scrambling to become known as "employers of choice."

There's no doubt about it — IT professionals are still a very hot commodity, and they know it. They demand higher salaries, better working conditions, more responsibility and access to training and technologies. If they don't get it, there are plenty more jobs where yours came from.

The companies that qualify as the Best Places to Work in IT know this. They recognize that the key to their success is an IT staff that's happy and loyal on the job. They provide an environment that keeps people challenged and offers a sense of contribution and value. In the following pages, you'll learn the lessons of recruiting and retention that the Best Places have to offer.

"Train to Retrain" (page 22) discusses the importance of a well-rounded training package that tackles technology, business and management skills.

Beyond training, "Rich Rewards" (page 37) examines the trends in pay and perks for a more-satisfied IT worker.

"A Guiding Hand" (page 26) looks at the growing role of mentoring programs to teach employees the business and help them develop their careers, while "All for One" (page 34) emphasizes teaming IT pros with their business peers to develop communication skills.

"Serving Up Hot Projects" (page 29) reveals the importance of keeping workers challenged with important projects and top skills.

Finally, "No Wandering Eyes" (page 44) finds that the employees at Best Places don't need to look around for top pay and training — they already have it.



Staff (Clockwise from top left): Lorraine Cosgrove, Pat Hyde, Laura Hunt, David Weldon, Mary Beth Welch, Amy Malloy and Dan Beard

David Weldon
david_weldon@computerworld.com

Stella Johnson

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Chart Toppers

The top five Best Places to Work companies take care of their own, offering the best in training, pay and benefits

BY LESLIE GOFF

The 100 Best Places to Work in IT

Rank	Company	Location	Employees	Year Founded
1	Microsoft	Redmond, WA	25,000	1981
2	Oracle	Redwood City, CA	15,000	1977
3	IBM	Armonk, NY	350,000	1911
4	Novell	Plano, TX	10,000	1982
5	Unisys	Bedford, MA	20,000	1960
6	Compaq	Palo Alto, CA	15,000	1982
7	Intel	Folsom, CA	10,000	1968
8	3Com	Sunnyvale, CA	5,000	1980
9	Sequent	Belmont, MA	5,000	1982
10	PerkinElmer	Shelton, CT	5,000	1960
11	Motorola	Phoenix, AZ	10,000	1928
12	Rockwell International	Downers Grove, IL	10,000	1950
13	Rockwell Automation	Mayfield Heights, OH	5,000	1982
14	Rockwell International	Downers Grove, IL	10,000	1950
15	Rockwell International	Downers Grove, IL	10,000	1950
16	Rockwell International	Downers Grove, IL	10,000	1950
17	Rockwell International	Downers Grove, IL	10,000	1950
18	Rockwell International	Downers Grove, IL	10,000	1950
19	Rockwell International	Downers Grove, IL	10,000	1950
20	Rockwell International	Downers Grove, IL	10,000	1950

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The 100 Best Places to Work

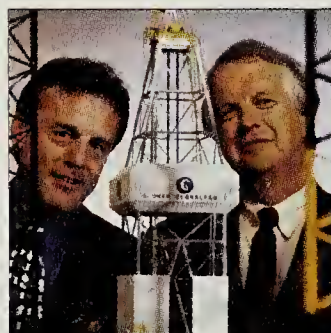
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Retail: Minding the Store BY FAWN FITTER

Technology: A Delicate Balance BY FAWN FITTER

Utilities: Lighting the Way BY STEVE ALEXANDER



The Top

1

Lincoln Electric Think Globally, Act Locally

Maureen Bagley joined Lincoln Electric in Cleveland in 1990, right after she graduated from Purdue University. Nine years later, she's been at the company far longer than she would ever have imagined.

Originally, Bagley thought she'd get just a year or two of experience at the manufacturer of engines and welding supplies and then move back to St. Louis, her hometown. But the atmosphere induced her to stay.

"I ended up loving the company," she says.

"There is a real family here and a sense of loyalty that all Lincoln employees have," explains Bagley, a systems architect. "You feel like you want the company to do well. And when it does, we have the bonuses."

The Lincoln bonus program, The Incentive Performance System, began in 1934 and is legendary in business school case studies. Thirty-one percent of each employee's salary is based on meeting personal and company performance targets.

Also legendary is Lincoln's history of offering cutting-edge benefits. The 104-year-old company was among the first to provide group life insurance, in 1915; paid vacations, in 1923; and employee stock ownership, in 1925. More recently, Lincoln has broadened its benefits to cover spousal equivalents, and it offers elder care and subsidized child care.

The benefits, in turn, create a team spirit that extends beyond the workday. Group lunches are

de rigueur, and there's a company dinner dance each winter and a family day each spring at an amusement park.

"There's a camaraderie here," says Chuck Mehlman, vice president and CIO.

Nevertheless, Bagley concedes, two years ago, when information technology demand — and salaries — began to skyrocket, she thought about looking around. Though her annual bonus was a strong incentive, the base pay was low.

Moreover, Bagley was starting to feel that IT's overall contribution was limited. "If we wanted to do something new, we would have meetings for months and months, and then nothing would happen," she says.

But then the IT environment changed. A new senior management team launched a corporate initiative to improve Lincoln's global position. With the initiative came a move to fortify the local IT ranks.

The team hired Mehlman and bought in to his plan to implement companywide standards and procedures, scrap Lincoln's legacy systems for an ambitious SAP AG installation, build a data warehouse and invest in people.

Lincoln's internal IT staff wasn't sacrificed in the transition. The permanent staff doubled in a year. Lincoln paid \$33,000 per IT employee for an average 26 days

each during enterprise resource planning training, and salaries were increased to match the national market.

"It's a lot different than the way it was even two years ago," says Bagley, who has received a promotion and three salary adjustments in the past two years, including one \$15,000 hike. "We had to scrape by then."

Though busier now, IT professionals and line-of-business staffers, who are organized into functional "pods," find ways to make merry throughout the workweeks in spite of the intensity.

Bagley's pod, for example, plays a 10-minute game of *Jeopardy* each day and keeps a running tally of the scores.

Earlier this year, Bagley returned from four months of fully paid maternity leave. "As a new mom, all the hours were getting to me," she says. "Management came out and said, 'You are worth more on the project at 40 hours a week than zero hours, so work what you can. Don't abandon your family.'"

Maureen Bagley and her co-workers gather every day for a 10-minute game of *Jeopardy*



Five

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Harrah's Odds-On Favorite

Todd Dube, an applications programmer, and his wife were ready to leave Detroit for greener pastures. They were looking for a city where they could raise a family and find steady, challenging work.

Dube had been working for Harrah's Entertainment Inc. as a consultant, and the company, which operates 18 casinos and hotels under three chains — Harrah's, Showboat and the new Rio — flew him to Memphis to interview for a full-time position at its headquarters.

The small city on the banks of the Mississippi River, home to Graceland, Sun Records and some of the South's best barbecue, fit the bill. It had good neighborhoods close to the company and other amenities, Dube says. But it was the environment at Harrah's that sealed the deal.

"There was no silver bullet — it was a combination of things," Dube says of his attraction to Harrah's. "I've talked to people who have been here 18 years, and they are really smart and could go anywhere. But they choose to stay here."

In fact, Harrah's IT organization has only a 5% turnover rate. Eileen Cassini, director of information technology services, attributes that to a "holistic approach" to recruiting and retention. The combination of a comfortable city and a comfortable company puts the odds in Harrah's favor, offering a balance in professional and personal lives that's hard to beat.

Last year, Harrah's spent \$6,000

These five Best Places to Work companies offer top-notch training, benefits, pay and skill-building opportunities **BY LESLIE GOFF**

per IT staff member on training for a minimum of two weeks each. Everyone on the 400-member staff went through Visual Basic classes as well as training in Web development tools, and 90% had enterprise resource planning (ERP) training. Dube says they also had the option of taking classes in business writing, project management and other soft skills.

"We were launching new IT projects, and IT is taking a bigger role as a partner to the business," Cassini says.

This year, the company is implementing an extensive ERP system for financials and human resources. It will work in conjunction with Harrah's data warehouse, dubbed WINet (a registered trademark), which allows users to instantly retrieve customer information online.

With so much IT activity, Dube found the challenging work he had wanted. In his group, the company is installing and customizing a Teradata decision-support database for marketing. He's working on a front end for customer service representatives, called the TeleServices Workstation Manager, which enables the representatives to retrieve information on each customer's preferences.

"They let us take risks," Dube says. For example, he saw some areas in which he could improve the speed and ease of use of the system. "As long as I can identify the benefits, I can run with whatever ideas I have."

The corporate benefits are good, too. Every Friday, the workday ends at 11:30 a.m., giving employees time



"We work as hard on retention as we do on attraction," says Harrah's Eileen Cassini

for personal errands or an early start to a long weekend. Families with high school seniors can apply for corporate college scholarships. The employee referral reward is \$3,000, plus an entry into a drawing for a Caribbean vacation. The company offers tuition reimbursement for both career-related and extraneous courses. And it matches employee contributions to the 401(k) plan dollar for dollar up to 6% of their annual salary.

"We work as hard on retention as we do on attraction," says Cassini, who has been at Harrah's 26 years. Last year, she took home a Chairman's Leadership Award, owing at least in part to her role in the organization's outstanding retention record.

"There's a feeling of permanence and security here . . . an esprit de corps," she says.

Dube has been at Harrah's now for two years. Nine months ago his wife joined the company as well. Memphis, it turns out, was worth the gamble. ▸

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Jack Kenner

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Computer Associates

Too Much

Of a Good Thing

When a Computer Associates International Inc. employee suggested recently that the company cafeteria deliver lunch to people in their cubicles, CA management rejected the idea. It wasn't because of the expense or the extra effort. CA already goes the extra mile, and then some, to make the workday more convenient for its employees.

You can buy takeout food, milk or eggs at the company's on-site deli as you leave for the day. You can work out at the company's on-site gym. You can drop off your kids at the on-site Montessori day care center. You can give blood at the office.

The idea was rejected, says Gary Quinn, because even convenience can be too much of a good thing.

"We don't want people to be isolated in their workspace all day," explains Quinn, executive vice president for global information and administrative services at the Islandia, N.Y., company. "Some people take the convenience to an extreme and don't manage the balance between their work and home lives. . . . We don't want their whole lives revolving around this building."

And yet working for CA's information technology organization is as much a lifestyle choice as a career choice. Quinn's staffers work on average nine to nine and a half hours per day. In exchange, CA goes out of its way to make employees' lives easier. Besides the day-to-day conveniences, employees get a wide range of uncommon benefits, from free breakfast and dinner to elder care insurance and financial assistance for adoptions.

Bill Taub, a network engineer and administrator who came to CA

via an acquisition, has joined the fold wholeheartedly. Taub was CIO at ANT Internet, a small systems integrator and Web site development firm CA purchased in 1996. Though he often puts in 60-hour workweeks, he says he never feels chained to his desk. "I never feel that I can't leave," he says.

Taub says he feels well-rewarded by his salary, the bonus program and training opportunities, such as CA's support of his quest for Windows NT certification. The stability of working for a large, global IT organization frees him to focus on the job at hand, Taub adds, and he finds the day-to-day routine invigorating. "We have a great review process that rewards you with all you need to grow," Taub says. "We get new challenges daily, and feedback is easy to come by. In a lot of jobs, it seems as if you never do enough. Here you feel that your extra effort is appreciated."

Whereas CA spent much of the past two years rebuilding its IT infrastructure, it has now turned its focus to constructing internal applications to support its services organization and business-to-business e-commerce, Quinn says. With the infrastructure stabilized, staff growth has slowed to 15% this year from 20% last year. Nevertheless, CA faces the same IT recruiting and retention

challenges as everyone else, Quinn says. Turnover rose to 10% last year from 2% to 4% in 1997. He blames the local job market.

"On Long Island, it's extremely competitive," Quinn says. "Everyone has a job, so there's a churn of employed professionals. We have The Bank of New York, Cablevision [Systems Corp.], Arrow [Electronics Inc.] and a lot of small and medium companies that are now willing to pay the salaries and benefits that CA pays."

In response, Quinn initiated a project-completion bonus program for his IT staff. Between April 1998 and March 1999, about a half-dozen staff members received all-expense-



Reinhold Spiegler

Computer Associates' Gary Quinn initiated a project-completion bonus program, rewarding IT employees with cash and trips.

paid trips for their families. Others garnered cash bonuses of 7% to 10% of their base salary for meeting deadlines with the identified deliverables.

Because sometimes you can't get too much of a good thing. ▸

Profiles, page 8

"OUR BUSINESS IS INFORMATION"

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So, if you're an IT professional who enjoys the freedom to develop new and innovative models, drive strategy and work in a team environment with a fast-growing company named "one of the top 100 companies to work for" by *Fortune* magazine, then perhaps it's time you considered Capital One.

Capital One

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For more information, visit our website at www.capitalone.com

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4

USAA
At Your
Service

At Christmastime, when parents of young children were racing frantically around San Antonio to get hard-to-find Beanie Babies Wrinkles and Unicorn, Ellen Fernandez just walked over to an on-site United Services Automobile Association (USAA) employee store, one of five on the corporate campus. It had plenty of them. No problem.

When she needed some cold medicine one afternoon, Fernandez didn't have to sneak out to drive to a drugstore. She just walked over to one of USAA's three on-site medical clinics. No problem.

"No problem" is a recurring theme at USAA, a provider of insurance and financial services to military personnel and their families. Is commuting to the office giving you a case of road rage? No problem. Just use the company's van pool service. Need one day a week to yourself? No problem. Take advantage of the company's four-day workweek, or work three 12-hour days. USAA is flexible.

In fact, USAA's corporate culture is legendary in San Antonio. The campus is a sprawling 286 acres of office space, jogging paths, softball fields and tennis courts. On the grounds, in addition to the employee stores and walk-in clinics, are three fitness centers and five company cafeterias.

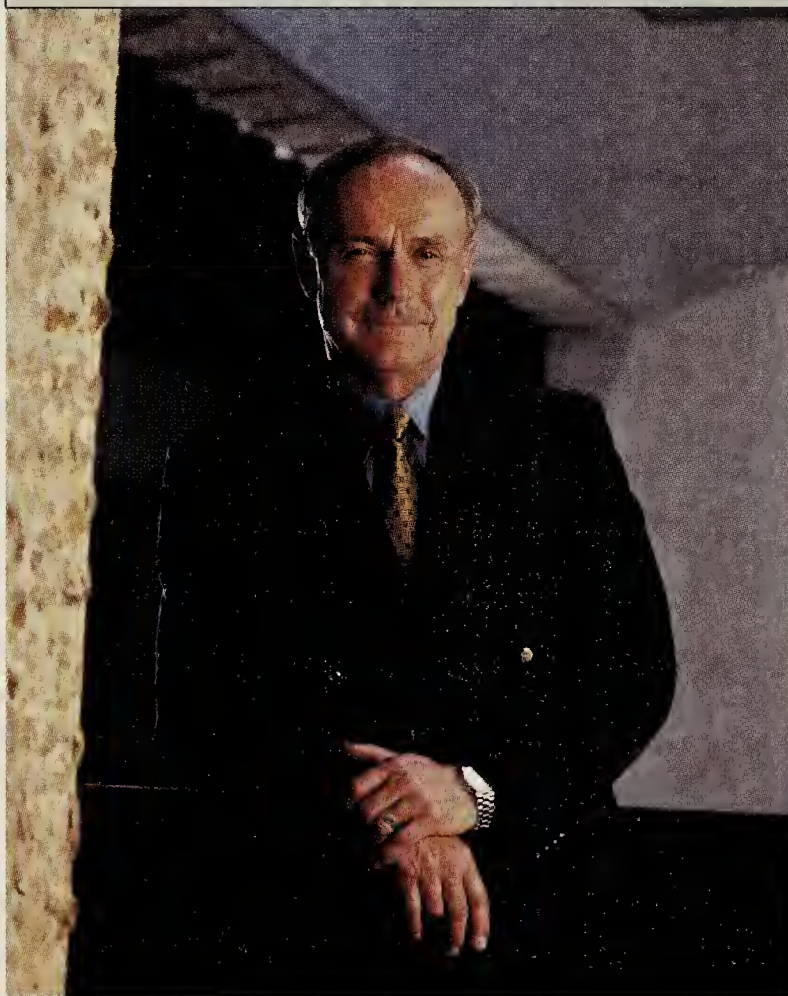
"People have always wanted to come work here," says Fernandez, a San Antonio native who worked in the area as a mainframe programmer for 18 years before joining USAA

last fall as an IT recruiter.

USAA's no-problem attitude toward employee comforts is grounded in a service ethic that can be traced to the company's origins. The founders were 25 Army officers who banded together in 1922 to insure themselves after they left the military.

The company's mission is to serve others who have served, and nowhere is this more evident than in IT, which encourages using technology "to service, not to sell," says retired Army Gen. Donald Walker, CIO of USAA and president and CEO of its IT arm, USAA Information Technology Co. "[USAA] believes in leveraging IT to provide better service, all the way up to the CEO, who is willing to make the

Donald Walker, CIO, says
USAA views its people
as "strategic assets."



James McGoan

infrastructure investments."

The company conducts 80% of its business over the phone, Walker says, and IT develops call center innovations and data mining applications to make customer service representatives more responsive.

USAA's allegiance to its customers spills over into its relationship with its employees as well. "If we take care of our employees, they will take care of our members," Walker says.

USAA staff are offered an aggressive training program. The program includes eight days of classroom training per year, plus Twilight University, an evening program featuring speakers on IT topics; Tech Days, when USAA's vendors set up product demonstrations at the company; and the T&T Transitions to New Technology seminar series, which features leading IT thinkers.

"Our training is very interactive and engaging," Walker says. "Our strategic assets are our people and our technology, and helping the workforce absorb the technology and making sure they know how to use it is an exciting part of what we do."

The training was one of the draws for Fernandez when she first looked at USAA. "I knew they'd give me the training I needed to go on with my career," she says. Fernandez plans to get training in Visual Basic and Java.

The four-day workweek and a generous 401(k) plan that matches employee contributions dollar for dollar up to 6% of their annual salary were also magnets for Fernandez. USAA also offers corporate performance-based bonuses of between 14% and 16% of annual salary, discretionary holiday bonuses of two-weeks' pay and a paid pension plan with a built-in inflation rate.

These benefits, combined with the training, make Walker's job a lot easier:

USAA's IT turnover rate is a mere 3.6%, including retirees.

"We have a service ethic that our employees can come to work every morning feeling good about," Walker says. ▀

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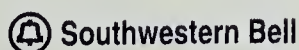
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5

Avon

More Than Meets the Eye

Appearances mean a lot in a cosmetics company. When Harriet Edelman accepted the position of interim CIO more than a year ago at Avon Products Inc. in New York, while she was also senior vice president of global operations, she looked at what its IT recruitment ads conveyed about the company.

"A lot of people still associate us with the 'Ding-dong, Avon calling' ads from the '50s," says Edelman, who still holds the senior vice president position. As of April, Avon's CIO has been Sateesh Lele. "We are high-touch, but behind that is a lot of high tech."

Avon processes 50 million individual customer orders and 2 million business transactions per year. "We're transaction-intense, and we require a lot of technology for the backbone," Edelman says.

So while the ads emphasized some of the company's benefits and core values — the work environment, on-site day care, diversity — they lacked high-tech oomph. "I wanted to macho them up a bit and put in information about the applications and the environment," Edelman explains.

"And our technology looks good, too." The hit ratio went up immediately. So did the company's internal employee referrals.

Edelman's fresh approach to the ads illuminates Avon's essence. Though the company is 114 years old and possesses a firmly entrenched corporate culture, it's among the most diverse, forward-thinking companies around. The company's benefits include elder care reimbursement, telecommuting, flextime and benefits

for spousal equivalents, all designed to respond to employees' shifting needs. Women make up 39% of the information technology staff, and ethnic minorities account for 31%. Among the IT managers, 28% are women, and 16% are minorities.

The cubicles with windows go to staff rather than management. Nearly every week, there's a luncheon to recognize an outstanding employee.

In addition, Avon has spent an average of \$23,000 each on several large events for employees in the past two years, says Debra Pinon, a database analyst.

"We've been under so much stress and pressure that Harriet wanted to build morale," says Pinon, who organized the events. "People aren't complaining, but we work a lot of hours. We want to keep everyone happy, and this helps."

In the past six years, Avon's character has manifested itself in an IT environment that's aggressively responding to the changing business. Last year, Avon rolled out a formula management system to support product development; it just completed a blueprint for a global marketing system; it's in the midst of an enterprise resource planning implementation; and it's deploying Web-enabled applications in the field that will be tied to its data marts. And it has e-commerce projects.

The IT work environment may be enlightened, but the work ethic is intense. With so many projects in the loop, IT is an around-the-clock operation that can, at times, be "punishing," Edelman says.

Staff members carry beepers, and many work on weekends. Management has to pay constant attention to the ambience and the balance between work and home.

Pinon, for example, is a single

mother of a 7-year-old. Although she has the option of working flexible hours, she says she prefers "to be in the middle of the action." But when her daughter is home sick, Pinon works at home, courtesy of a laptop and an Integrated Services Digital Network line paid for by Avon.

"Management has never had a problem with that, and there are all sorts of home issues around here that all get addressed," she says.

Yet amid all the pressure and change, the commitment to Avon's

"We are high-touch, but behind that is a lot of high tech," says Harriet Edelman, with Avon's CIO, Sateesh Lele.



Reinhold Spiegler

nucleus remains firmly intact, Edelman says. It's the "Avon Lady," the door-to-door sales associate who made the company what it is today, who continues to define IT's mission.

"That alone sets an inherent spirit and a character to the organization that is extremely warm and giving," she says. ▀

Goff is a freelance writer in New York. Contact her at lgoff@ix.netcom.com.

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the top 100

The 100 Best Places to Work in IT

Rank	Company	Industry/location	Web site	Average days of training*	Staff employed 5 years or more
1	Lincoln Electric	Industrial/farm equipment Cleveland	www.lincolnelectric.com	26	21%
2	Harrah's Entertainment Inc.	Entertainment Memphis	www.harrahs.com	14	45%
3	Computer Associates International Inc.	Computer software and services Islandia, N.Y.	www.cai.com	21	39%
4	United Services Automobile Association	Insurance San Antonio	www.usaa.com	8	62%
5	Avon Products Inc.	Cosmetic/skin care products New York	www.avon.com	14	48%
6	PricewaterhouseCoopers	Professional services/consulting New York	www.pwcglobal.com	27	8%
7	Musicland Stores Corp.	Retail Minnetonka, Minn.	www.musicland.com	10	80%
8	The St. Paul Cos.	Insurance St. Paul, Minn.	www.stpaul.com	10	47%
9	Minnesota Life Insurance Co.	Insurance St. Paul, Minn.	www.minnesotamutual.com	25	50%
10	The Home Depot Inc.	Retail Atlanta	www.homedepot.com	17	40%
11	KeySpan Energy Corp.	Utilities Hicksville, N.Y.	www.keyspanenergy.com	7	85%
12	Solelectron Corp.	Computers/electronics Milpitas, Calif.	www.solelectron.com	15	30%
13	Capital One Financial Corp.	Financial services Falls Church, Va.	www.capitalone.com	20	11%
14	The Earthgrains Co.	Food service St. Louis	www.earthgrains.com	15	60%
15	Norrell Corp.	Professional services/consulting Atlanta	www.norrell.com	10	25%
16	Orion Capital Corp.	Insurance Farmington, Conn.	www.orioncapital.com	20	40%
17	Consolidated Stores Corp.	Retail Columbus, Ohio	www.cnstore.com	10	60%
18	Avnet Inc.	Computers/electronics distributor Phoenix	www.avnet.com	20	42%
19	Chevron Corp.	Oil/gas exploration/refining San Francisco	www.chevron.com	10	90%
20	Corning Inc.	Computers/electronics Corning, N.Y.	www.corning.com	10	75%
21	Dynegy Inc.	Utilities Houston	www.dynegy.com	10	20%
22	Regions Financial Corp.	Financial services Birmingham, Ala.	www.regionsbank.com	10	60%
23	Staples Inc.	Retail Framingham, Mass.	www.staples.com	8	40%
24	The Chase Manhattan Corp.	Financial services New York	www.chase.com	15	56%
25	Cigna Corp.	Insurance Philadelphia	www.cigna.com	6	66%
26	Fannie Mae	Financial services Washington	www.fanniemae.com	13	43%
27	Office Depot Inc.	Retail Delray Beach, Fla.	www.officedepot.com	10	30%
28	Wal-Mart Stores Inc.	Retail Bentonville, Ark.	www.wal-mart.com	25	46%
29	Household International Inc.	Financial services Prospect Heights, Ill.	www.household.com	14	60%
30	J. B. Hunt Transport Services Inc.	Transportation Lowell, Ark.	www.jbhunt.com	15	19%
31	Phillips Petroleum Co.	Oil/gas exploration/refining Bartlesville, Okla.	www.phillips66.com	10	92%
32	Sears, Roebuck and Co.	Retail Hoffman Estates, Ill.	www.sears.com	10	36%

Methodology

When we set out to find the best places to work in information technology this year, we started by defining the characteristics of a "good" place to work: interesting projects, flexibility, opportunities for advancement, diversity, benefits and an interest in the overall well-being of employees.

We surveyed CIOs, vice presidents, directors and managers at Fortune 1,000 companies and major consulting firms. Our survey asked them about their organizations' benefits, training, average salary increases, percent of staff promoted, turnover rates and the percentage of women and minority staff in management positions in IT departments. In addition, we wanted to hear about each organization's

hot projects, mentoring programs and a variety of benefits ranging from elder care and child care to flextime and stock options.

We contacted 1,144 organizations in November 1998, asking them to complete the survey. The ranking is based on several of the criteria, each given equal weight and scored separately. The ranking is based on information gathered at that time.

	Average increase in compensation*	Base salary percent of total compensation	Bonuses percent of total compensation	Staff in cross-functional teams**	Formal mentoring program	IT managers/women	IT managers/minorities
	28%	64%	36%	58%	Yes	29%	14%
	15%	79%	21%	80%	Yes	41%	11%
	15%	88%	12%	60%	Yes	28%	23%
	14%	88%	12%	40%	Yes	33%	24%
	15%	87%	13%	68%	Yes	31%	16%
	14%	88%	12%	95%	Yes	26%	21%
	10%	79%	21%	70%	Yes	50%	10%
	10%	96%	4%	25%	Yes	39%	4%
	11%	87%	13%	62%	Yes	53%	4%
	NA	44%	56%	90%	Yes	30%	7%
	10%	90%	10%	50%	Yes	20%	25%
	8%	85%	15%	100%	Yes	25%	50%
	12%	77%	23%	90%	Yes	3%	2%
	8%	86%	14%	100%	No	50%	0%
	15%	78%	22%	90%	Yes	50%	25%
	15%	75%	25%	65%	No	27%	8%
	10%	75%	25%	65%	Yes	20%	10%
	7%	90%	10%	90%	Yes	33%	33%
	4%	90%	10%	70%	Yes	21%	15%
	10%	93%	7%	75%	Yes	40%	11%
	6%	79%	21%	60%	No	40%	25%
	5%	78%	22%	30%	Yes	57%	13%
	13%	90%	10%	55%	Yes	35%	5%
	7%	88%	12%	30%	Yes	27%	25%
	6%	88%	12%	58%	Yes	39%	9%
	9%	74%	26%	75%	Yes	43%	35%
	10%	86%	14%	60%	No	27%	22%
	12%	85%	15%	60%	Yes	27%	6%
	7%	96%	4%	55%	Yes	36%	14%
	17%	87%	13%	70%	Yes	36%	0%
	14%	85%	15%	50%	Yes	14%	3%
	5%	90%	10%	75%	Yes	45%	15%

Note: All results apply to IT staff only. *1998, expected at time of survey; **with business units

The 100 Best Places to Work in IT

Rank	Company	Industry/location	Web site	Average days of training*	Staff employed 5 years or more
33	Teco Energy Inc.	Utilities Tampa, Fla.	www.teco.net	10	60%
34	Cabot Corp.	Chemicals Boston	www.cabot-corp.com	11	85%
35	Cox Communications Inc.	Telecommunications/media Atlanta	www.cox.com	15	80%
36	Global Marine Inc.	Oil/gas exploration/refining Houston	www.glm.com	10	85%
37	InaCom Corp.	Computer reseller Omaha	www.inacom.com	10	60%
38	Apple Computer Inc.	Computers/electronics Cupertino, Calif.	www.apple.com	25	90%
39	Continental Airlines Inc.	Transportation Houston	www.continental.com	5	95%
40	Fingerhut Cos.	Retail Minnetonka, Minn.	www.fingerhut.com	10	60%
41	John Hancock Mutual Life Insurance Co.	Insurance Boston	www.jhancock.com	8	71%
42	Lucent Technologies Inc.	Telecom equipment and software Murray Hill, N.J.	www.lucent.com	10	71%
43	Allstate Insurance Co.	Insurance Northbrook, Ill.	www.allstate.com	10	63%
44	MONY Group Inc.	Insurance New York	www.mony.com	8	63%
45	Sonoco Products Co.	Forest and paper products Hartsville, S.C.	www.sonoco.com	18	62%
46	Best Buy Co.	Retail Eden Prairie, Minn.	www.bestbuy.com	15	17%
47	Crown Central Petroleum Corp.	Oil/gas exploration/refining Baltimore	www.crownfleet.com	10	80%
48	Federated Mutual Insurance Co.	Insurance Owatonna, Minn.	www.federatedinsurance.com	11	60%
49	Modis Professional Services Inc.	Professional services/consulting Jacksonville, Fla.	www.modispro.com	12	10%

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The 100 Best Places to Work in IT

Average increase in compensation*	Base salary percent of total compensation	Bonuses percent of total compensation	Staff in cross-functional teams**	Formal mentoring program	IT managers/ women	IT managers/ minorities
6%	87%	13%	100%	Yes	50%	25%
10%	86%	14%	70%	Yes	15%	15%
8%	88%	12%	55%	No	30%	2%
6%	73%	27%	80%	Yes	25%	40%
9%	87%	13%	40%	Yes	45%	10%
5%	88%	12%	25%	No	10%	10%
15%	80%	20%	50%	Yes	60%	10%
9%	96%	4%	80%	No	50%	5%
9%	82%	18%	50%	Yes	35%	7%
5%***	87%	13%	75%	Yes	39%	20%
NA	NA	NA	50%	No	30%	16%
8%	93%	7%	65%	Yes	56%	11%
7%	90%	10%	65%	No	22%	17%
20%	94%	6%	65%	Yes	31%	8%
10%	75%	25%	50%	No	10%	2%
12%	96%	4%	40%	No	45%	45%
13%	89%	11%	80%	Yes	40%	20%

Note: All results apply to IT staff only. *1998, expected at time of survey; **with business units; ***not including bonus

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our customers well,
wait until you see how
we treat our employees.



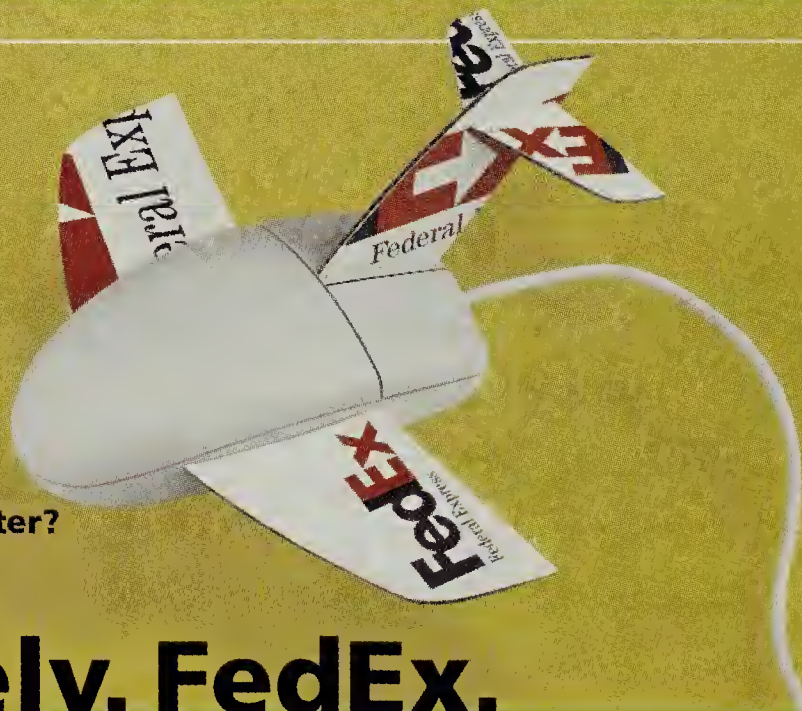
www.nordstrom.com/itjobs

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The 100 Best Places to Work in IT

Rank	Company	Industry/location	Web site	Average days of training*	Staff employed 5 years or more
50	Trinity Industries Inc.	Manufacturing/transportation Dallas	www.trin.net	20	15%
51	Navistar International Corp.	Truck manufacturer Chicago	www.navistar.com	10	70%
52	Amgen Inc.	Pharmaceuticals Thousand Oaks, Calif.	wwwext.amgen.com	10	45%
53	Sigma-Aldrich Corp.	Chemicals St. Louis	www.sigma-aldrich.com	14	70%
54	UnitedHealth Group	Health care Minnetonka, Minn.	www.unitedhealthgroup.com	8	20%
55	Wisconsin Energy Corp.	Utilities Milwaukee	www.wisenergy.com	7	64%
56	Honeywell Inc.	Electronics/electrical equipment Minneapolis	www.honeywell.com	5	75%
57	Parker Hannifin Corp.	Electronics/industrial equipment Cleveland	www.parker.com	15	60%
58	Airgas Inc.	Chemicals Radnor, Pa.	www.airgas.com	15	35%
59	Costco Cos.	Retail Issaquah, Wash.	www.costco.com	21	70%
60	Masco Corp.	Retail Taylor, Mich.	www.masco.com	15	65%
61	The Limited Inc.	Retail Columbus, Ohio	www.limited.com	10	60%
62	Metropolitan Life Insurance Co.	Insurance New York	www.metlife.com	12	57%
63	Public Service Company of New Mexico	Utilities Albuquerque, N.M.	www.pnm.com	14	50%
64	Unisys Corp.	Computers/services Blue Bell, Pa.	www.unisys.com	12	80%
65	Xerox Corp.	Computers/office equipment Stamford, Conn.	www.xerox.com	10	75%
66	Becton, Dickinson and Co.	Health care Franklin, N.J.	www.bd.com	10	60%

IT PROFESSIONALS



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Internet Glittering Trendsetter?

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The 100 Best Places to Work in IT

Average increase in compensation*	Base salary percent of total compensation	Bonuses percent of total compensation	Staff in cross-functional teams**	Formal mentoring program	IT managers/women	IT managers/minorities
7%	82%	18%	30%	Yes	30%	10%
4%	75%	25%	30%	Yes	7%	5%
18%	88%	12%	75%	No	30%	18%
6%	100%	0%	80%	No	40%	20%
10%	71%	29%	90%	Yes	39%	7%
15%	92%	8%	57%	No	31%	6%
7%	88%	12%	50%	Yes	30%	10%
18%	88%	12%	50%	No	25%	10%
8%	80%	20%	100%	Yes	46%	6%
11%	92%	8%	75%	Yes	34%	0%
12%	88%	12%	80%	Yes	0%	0%
20%	73%	27%	100%	Yes	31%	12%
9%	88%	12%	60%	No	29%	10%
9%	81%	19%	20%	No	50%	20%
6%	100%	0%	80%	Yes	20%	10%
5%	67%	33%	100%	Yes	37%	13%
5%	88%	12%	35%	No	15%	25%

Note: All results apply to IT staff only. *1998, expected at time of survey; **with business units

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USER TECHNOLOGY ASSOCIATES, INC.

Closing the Gap Between the User and Technology®

The 100 Best Places to Work in IT

Rank	Company	Industry/location	Web site	Average days of training*	Staff employed 5 years or more
67	Foodmaker Inc.	Food service San Diego	www.foodmaker.com	10	90%
68	Marshall Industries	Computers/electronics distributor El Monte, Calif.	www.marshall.com	10	90%
69	MidAmerican Energy Holdings Co.****	Utilities Des Moines, Iowa	www.midamerican.com	10	73%
70	Daimler Chrysler Corp.	Motor vehicles and parts Auburn Hills, Mich.	www.daimlerchrysler.com	10	94%
71	Northern States Power Co.	Utilities Minneapolis	www.nspco.com	5	71%
72	Aetna Inc.	Health care/financial services Hartford, Conn.	www.aetna.com	6	73%
73	American Management Systems Inc.	Professional services/consulting Fairfax, Va.	www.amsinc.com	8	22%
74	CDW Computer Centers Inc.	Retail Vernon Hills, Ill.	www.cdw.com	10	13%
75	Comerica Inc.	Financial services Detroit	www.coamerica.com	5	66%
76	Harley-Davidson Inc.	Motor vehicles and parts Milwaukee	www.harley-davidson.com	10	22%
77	PG&E Corp.	Utilities San Francisco	www.pgecorp.com	10	60%
78	AFLAC Inc.	Insurance Columbus, Ga.	www.aflac.com	5	21%
79	Caterpillar Inc.	Industrial/farm equipment Peoria, Ill.	www.caterpillar.com	10	74%
80	The Charles Schwab Corp.	Financial services San Francisco	www.schwab.com	10	25%
81	Edison International	Utilities Rosemead, Calif.	www.edison.com	10	63%
82	Fifth Third Bancorp.	Financial services Cincinnati	www.53.com	60	67%
83	Frontier Corp.	Telecommunications Rochester, N.Y.	www.frontiercorp.com	10	31%

****CalEnergy Co. provided the responses to this survey.

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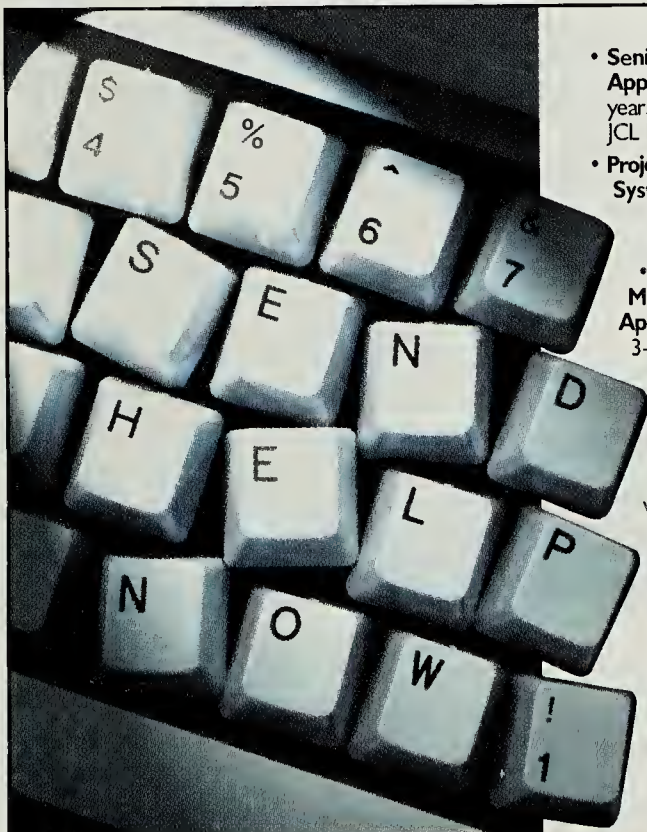
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The 100 Best Places to Work in IT

Average increase in compensation*	Base salary percent of total compensation	Bonuses percent of total compensation	Staff in cross-functional teams**	Formal mentoring program	IT managers/ women	IT managers/ minorities
5%	72%	28%	70%	Yes	70%	10%
10%	89%	11%	100%	Yes	35%	80%
4%	84%	16%	15%	No	14%	0%
15%	92%	8%	40%	Yes	1%	1%
7%	97%	3%	48%	No	27%	29%
9%	88%	12%	60%	No	40%	6%
10%	91%	9%	100%	Yes	37%	8%
10%	89%	11%	90%	Yes	20%	0%
8%	84%	16%	25%	No	38%	10%
9%	92%	8%	25%	Yes	28%	7%
6%	75%	25%	60%	Yes	10%	18%
16%	91%	9%	80%	No	27%	12%
5%	86%	14%	70%	Yes	20%	5%
8%	87%	13%	60%	Yes	36%	19%
4%	86%	14%	10%	Yes	31%	34%
23%	71%	29%	60%	Yes	16%	5%
12%	90%	10%	40%	No	34%	10%

Note: All results apply to IT staff only. *1998, expected at time of survey; **with business units



- **Senior Programmer Analyst/ Application Development** - 5+ years' experience, MVS, COBOL, JCL DB2, IMS, CICS
- **Project Managers/ Merchandising Systems Application Development** - 5+ years' experience, MVS, COBOL
 - **Project Leader/ Merchandising Systems Application Development** - 3-5 years' experience, MVS, COBOL, JCL, DB2, IMS
 - **Senior Visual Basic Programmer Analyst** - 5 years' experience in VB6.0, NT, MS SQL Server. Interact with users, provide analysis, develop a new mobile software application for our business group.
- **Lotus Notes Administrator** - 3+ years' experience in performance tuning, security, maintenance, user accounts, etc.
- **Database Analyst** - 3-5 years' Sybase, MS SQL Server data connectivity and stored procedures; database development for new projects.
- **Business Analyst** - 3-5 years' Financial Systems Focus
- **Business Analyst** - 3-5 years' Merchandising Systems Focus
- **Sr. AS/400 Technical Analyst** - 5-7 years' experience handling configurations, performance management, security, communications, PTF's, upgrades, installs, technical support, etc.
- **Quality Assurance Analyst** - 1-2 years' experience, C, UNIX.
- **Sr. Programmer Analyst AS/400** - 5-7 years' RPG, RPG400, ASSET experience.
- **Senior Systems Programmer** - 2+ years' experience with MVS, CICS and DB2
- **System Managed Storage Database Specialist** - 2+ years' experience with SMS administration and IMS/DB2.
- **Senior Data Communication Specialist** - 5+ years' experience with routers, hubs, switches and sniffers.
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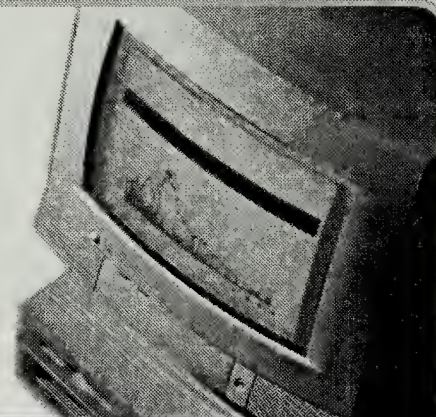
A.J. Wright

The 100 Best Places to Work in IT

Rank	Company	Industry/location	Web site	Average days of training*	Staff employed 5 years or more
84	State Farm Mutual Automobile Insurance Co.	Insurance Bloomington, Ill.	www1.statefarm.com	7	71%
85	Cummins Engine Co.	Motor vehicles and parts Columbus, Ind.	www.cummins.com	7	70%
86	McCormick & Co. Inc.	Food service Sparks, Md.	www.mccormick.com	10	18%
87	McDonald's Corp.	Food service Oak Brook, Ill.	www.mcdonalds.com	11	50%
88	Mercantile Bancorp.	Financial services St. Louis	www.mercantile.com	10	75%
89	Qwest Communications International Inc.	Telecommunications Denver	www.qwest.com	5	5%
90	Dow Jones & Co.	Publishing New York	www.dj.com	10	80%
91	Harleysville Group Inc.	Insurance Harleysville, Pa.	www.harleysvillegroup.com	10	90%
92	NCR Corp.	Computers/office equipment Dayton, Ohio	www.ncr.com	8	63%
93	Northern Trust Corp.	Financial services Chicago	www.ntrs.com	8	61%
94	United Stationers Inc.	Forest and paper products Des Plaines, Ill.	www.unitedstationers.com	6	42%
95	Universal Forest Products Inc.	Forest and paper products Grand Rapids, Mich.	www.ufpinc.com	10	20%
96	Cabletron Systems Inc.	Computers/office equipment Rochester, N.H.	www.ctrn.com	15	50%
97	EXCEL Communications Inc.	Telecommunications Dallas	www.excel.com	5	0%
98	Peoples Energy Corp.	Utilities Chicago	www.pecorp.com	7	50%
99	Southwest Airlines Co.	Transportation Dallas	www.southwest.com	8	15%
100	Standard Commercial Corp.	Tobacco/textiles Wilson, N.C.	NA	20	75%

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10%	88%	12%	85%	No	21%	10%
4%	94%	6%	90%	No	34%	12%
12%	93%	7%	60%	Yes	32%	14%
6%	86%	14%	65%	Yes	40%	20%
11%	89%	11%	50%	Yes	47%	50%
4%	97%	3%	10%	No	20%	15%
7%	86%	14%	20%	Yes	46%	3%
7%	94%	6%	40%	Yes	25%	6%
14%	93%	7%	50%	Yes	8%	3%
6%	87%	13%	50%	Yes	16%	12%
10%	86%	14%	25%	No	50%	0%
10%	86%	14%	60%	Yes	20%	10%
18%	71%	29%	25%	Yes	50%	25%
8%	85%	15%	60%	No	25%	5%
9%	93%	7%	60%	Yes	45%	7%
10%	80%	20%	100%	Yes	50%	0%

Note: All results apply to IT staff only. *1998, expected at time of survey; **with business units

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Train to Retain

The Top 100 Employers know employees won't stick around without the best in training, so they offer plenty of managerial and technical training, hoping employees will stay put **BY SHARON WATSON**

During his two years of employment at Lucent Technologies Inc., Carl Mahecha has received nearly nonstop training. He's been tutored in SAP and accepted into an exclusive information technology leadership training course developed by the Murray Hill, N.J., telecommunications equipment maker and Babson College in Wellesley, Mass. Mahecha is also being reimbursed by Lucent as he completes an MBA program. Oh, and he's being mentored and is himself a mentor.

"Those opportunities tell me that there's a future for me at Lucent beyond today, and they're willing to invest in that," says Mahecha, who's an internal SAP consultant at the company. "My motivation level is higher; I feel more confident and secure knowing that I'm investing in myself, doing research and development for my career. And Lucent gets a person with more skills, who's very driven, who can be more valuable to the company."

Mahecha's personal and professional experiences at Lucent are typical of those of IT staff at Best Places to Work. The average IT employee at a Best Place received an expected 14 days of training last year, at an average cost of more than \$7,300. With the demand for IT skills growing without a visible end and a continuing shortage of experienced talent, Best Places companies are using training to address two needs.

First, they use training to keep their IT staff on top of the latest technology so they can deliver the technology-driven solutions today's businesses demand. "The way things change, we don't have an option. Training isn't discretionary; it's a necessity," says Dick Hudson, CIO at Global Marine Inc., an offshore drilling contractor in Houston.

At the same time, Best Places CIOs freely acknowledge that training has become a vital retention tool, keeping IT talent challenged, satisfied

and away from headhunters and recruiters. "If people believe they're getting a tremendous value in training, they stay longer because they know they will have value if they choose to leave," says Herb Vinnicombe, vice president and CIO at Lucent.

Strategic Skills

IT training at Best Places generally falls into two categories: training in specific technical skills and applications and training in executive-level IT management. Which staff members get what training is often decided by the staff member and a mentor or supervisor (see story, page 26) after reviewing career goals, talents and existing skills.

Business training often ranges from professional writing courses and presentation skills to strategic management skills. Technical training subjects run the gamut from Java, C++, Visual Basic, Sybase, Oracle and SAP to the Internet, e-commerce and telecommunications data networking.

"We don't do training just to train," says Steve Bromet, CIO at Consolidated Stores Corp. The retailer uses training to meet its staffing needs as an AS/400 shop located in Columbus, Ohio, where competition for IT talent is especially intense, Bromet says.

Successful is that it lets trainees work on real-life business applications, says Roderick Booker, a senior programmer/analyst at Consolidated who graduated from the program. "We were encouraged to talk to users," he says. "If you understand what they're doing, you understand the problem better, and it's easier to learn."

Some Best Places CIOs also encourage staff to explore how leading-edge technologies may apply to their companies, which helps their career development. For example, IT staff at Office Depot Inc. routinely go to retail distribution and point-of-sale conferences, while the company's chief information systems architect goes to as many as 10 seminars each year to stay current on the latest concepts, says Bill Seltzer, executive vice president and CIO at the Delray Beach, Fla.-based company.

"Training is more than learning a technology, it's also about business applications and [research and development] for the future," Booker says.

The need to understand user requirements as well as strategic business issues is shaping the second prevalent form of training at Best Places: putting leading-edge technology in real-time business contexts. "When everyone knows what they're working on is mission-critical, that's an unbelievably effective way to keep people," Seltzer says.

To help accomplish that, the companies routinely include IT management courses in their training curriculum. Some send IT personnel to leading courses run by various business schools.

In addition to bringing management consultants to his IT training center to lead various business management seminars for IT staff, Hudson at Global Marine enrolls his key managers in the weeklong Managing the Information Resource program at the Anderson Graduate School at the University of California at Los Angeles.

Office Depot has an in-house

Continued on page 24

Employees received an average of 14 days of training last year.

Three years ago, the company created a training program for recruits from inside and outside the company. Many of the trainees don't have technical experience but want to break into IT. After an interviewing process, they go through three to seven months of training on Consolidated's business applications as well as RPG, Command Language and other AS/400 technical skills.

One reason the program is suc-

training

Continued from page 23

university in which IT staff receive four courses in management training. Boston-based Cabot Corp.'s "Cabot College" is built on the principles of Harvard University's Advanced Management Program courses.

Lucent has created its own management training course for its companywide IT services organization. It draws on materials created by the company's finance department and works in partnership with business experts at Babson College, which *U.S. News & World Report* recently ranked as having the top entrepreneurial business school in the country.

Only about 25 of Lucent's 5,000 IT staffers will be chosen for the Leadership Development Program, Vinnicombe says.

In general, the advanced management courses offered by Best Places are exclusive, with entrants needing to have demonstrated an interest in and aptitude for IT management.

However, the Best Places also offer tuition reimbursement programs to most or all employees.

Lucent's two-year program was

Most Best Places use intranets to help staff collaborate on projects and to share knowledge bases but haven't done much training via intranets. CIOs say they simply prefer old-fashioned classroom-style training, whether conducted by internal trainers or outside consultants. "I like my people to interact with someone who is learned," Hudson says.

"Good instructors can see who might require more help and attention."

In addition, classroom settings tend to keep partic-

ipants focused on the training, whereas a self-directed course might get short shrift if it had to be squeezed into the workday. "It's better to do the training intensively," says Craig Bickel, CIO at Cabot.

CIOs and IT staff also say the classroom format offers an invaluable chance to get to know colleagues, particularly in large, international

The average cost of training per employee last year was \$7,300.

designed to create graduates capable of being "transforming agents" who can help Lucent use IT to meet its business objectives, Vinnicombe says. Participants receive technical training in return for credits applicable toward an MBA.

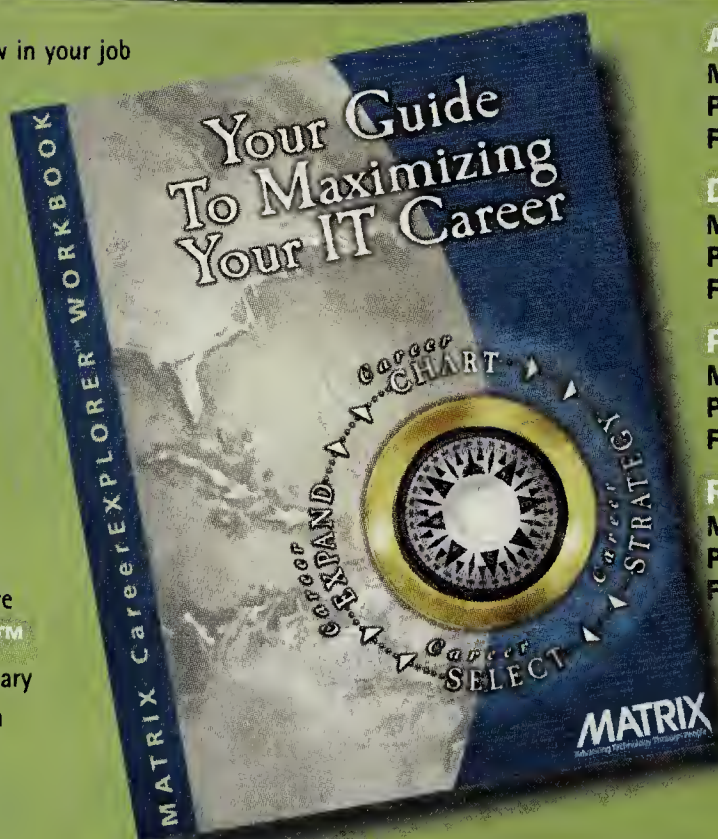
Most training still takes place in a classroom setting. The verdict is still out on intranets as training tools.

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organizations. "Folks need to meet and interact," Bickel says.

Mahecha says he's forming networking ties in Lucent's Leadership Development Program that will last throughout his career.

"I'm in a setting with people who are highly regarded in the company," he says.

The leadership program also helps the participants overcome the "silo mentality" that inhibits knowledge sharing at many companies, Mahecha says. "That will keep reaping rewards for us and for Lucent as we move on," he says.

Training tends to be continual at Best Places. Though classroom training may take up anywhere from a week to three weeks per year, IT staffers are generally expected to maintain a basic knowledge base by following specialty, trade and business publications.

Seltzer at Office Depot also sends

staff to industry trade shows and seminars to learn about the latest products and developments in fast-moving technologies such as e-commerce and data networking. "Vendors are often the best sources of education and knowledge," he says.

The Real Deal

These Best Places CIOs also say they always try to help IT staff who ask for specific training, even if the technology in question isn't used by the company, preferring to reward rather than thwart such initiative.

"I can't remember ever saying a flat 'no,'" says Bromet, noting that Consolidated would likely pay a portion of the training costs in such instances.

IT staffers at Best Places agree that their employers back up their spoken commitment to training. "A lot of places have training policies on

paper that look good when they're recruiting you, but aren't executable," Mahecha says.

Lucent, he notes, supports training by permitting employees to work flexible hours, providing them with information about reimbursable courses at various business schools, enabling them to register for those courses via Lucent's intranet and even directly reimbursing business schools.

Such attention to training details benefits the employer in the end, staffers say. "When you're well-trained, your confidence is higher, your abilities are greater and your productivity goes up," Booker says.

"Companies shouldn't underestimate the power of letting employees take advantage of opportunities to learn," Mahecha says. ▸

Watson is a freelance writer in Chicago. Contact her at sjwatson@interaccess.com.

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A Guiding Hand

Nearly three-quarters of Best Places companies offer formal mentoring programs **BY SHARON WATSON**

Kevin Kepp didn't expect to turn an entry-level job in the computer operations center at Consolidated Stores Corp. into a 15-year-plus career at the retailer. Today, he's project director of merchandising systems for the growing Columbus, Ohio-based company.

Though he's received various bouts of technical training through the years, Kepp credits much of his upward trek to mentoring from his original supervisor, Chuck Pifer.

"Chuck is an inspirational individual and an excellent motivator," Kepp says. "He builds your confidence and helps you to know you're capable of doing whatever you want to do."

Pifer, Consolidated's information systems operations director, not only encouraged Kepp, but also gave him the opportunities and tools to make the most of his talent, Kepp says. That included allowing Kepp to explore new technologies, work on pilot projects and generally have the freedom to take chances.

"Without those opportunities to learn, it would've been difficult to acquire the skill sets I did through training," Kepp says.

If training is the direct route to formal technical and management skills, mentoring is a hand-drawn map showing the byways and short-

cuts to using those skills effectively at a company.

"Mentors show people where the rocks and land mines are and how to step on the rocks to avoid the land mines," says Craig Bickel, CIO at Cabot Corp. in Boston.

Although 71% of companies that made our Best Places to Work list cat-

personalities and technical skills," Seltzer says.

At Office Depot, he says, directors generally match up mentoring partners; a person might stay with a mentor for quite a while or move from one to another to learn about applying different technologies.

Other Best Places companies also

have relatively informal mentoring matching processes, and CIOs note that no one is forced to stay in a mentoring relationship if the personalities and skills of the two parties clash.

CIOs and mentored people agree that the best mentors are those who are secure in their own abilities, so they aren't threatened by the abilities of the person they're mentoring. Yet they're open to learning from their "students," too. Good mentoring candidates aren't afraid to ask questions or to take on responsibility.

All agree that the worst mentors are those who impose their ideas and techniques instead of sharing

them.

Information and education gained via mentoring depends on the needs of the mentored person and the style of the mentor. Sometimes, mentoring involves a staff member literally following a mentor to meetings with management and vendors and learning about the idiosyncrasies of the players in a given situation.



Dick Hudson, right, mentored Gregg Farris while both worked at Global Marine

egorize their mentoring programs as "formal," mentoring is a highly individualized process.

"There aren't written rules to go by," says Bill Seltzer, CIO at Office Depot Inc. in Delray Beach, Fla. Directors of different information technology divisions at Office Depot match less-seasoned employees with company veterans. "It's more a fit of

“Dick constantly encouraged me to take advantage of career opportunities and gave me every chance to exercise the skills I brought to Global,” says Farris, who was mentored by Hudson from the start of his employment at the company. “He’s the best

To prepare him to be a CIO, Farris says Hudson shifted many of his responsibilities to Farris. “He’d say, ‘If you’re going to be a CIO, you need to do this’ — even if it was something Dick never allowed any-

For Hudson, his reward is the success of his mentoring graduates. "That's the thing I'm most proud of in my career," he says. ▀

Watson is a freelance writer in Chicago. She can be reached at sjwatson@interaccess.com.

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So, it's no surprise that the companies heading up *Computerworld's* Best Places to Work list are the ones most likely to have a spectrum of hot projects. Those include projects that call for working with emerging technologies for strategic year 2000, e-commerce, enterprise resource planning (ERP), data warehousing and intranet initiatives.

According to *Computerworld's* Best Places survey, a whopping 71% of companies say their year 2000 projects are "critical," followed by e-commerce (44%), ERP (33%), data warehousing (27%) and intranets (14%).

Gone are the days when IT took a backseat at the executive board meeting. Most companies, such as Allstate Insurance Co. in Northbrook, Ill., say IT projects these days are top on the corporate agenda. Such projects are "directly tied to strategic business needs, as they increasingly allow multiple thousands of people to touch more accurate information more quickly," says Frank Pollard, CIO at Allstate.

Also not surprisingly, Best Places companies have managed to work out ways to ensure that valued employees get the opportunities they need to work on critical projects. Increasingly, that involves formal retention programs that focus on job rotation; professional mentoring; career counseling; a cross-functional team working environment; scads of training; and, of course, wide-open opportunities for new job assignments.

Take Kim Schultze. After five

Employees want projects that use many skills
and offer challenging work **BY ALICE LaPLANTE**



Robin Jareaux

years at Allstate, she left her job in AS/400 support in 1994 to "check out some other opportunities." A year later, she was back, thanks to former colleagues who offered her the chance to work on a strategic redesign of Allstate's legacy system for its property and casualty business division. "It

was a wonderful chance to broaden my skill base," Schultze says. From there, she saw a job posting on Allstate's employment bulletin board for a position on the Y2K testing team. "I applied for it, and I got it," she says.

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hot projects

Continued from page 29

Schultze is now part of the effort to test all Allstate systems for Y2K compliance. "It's very exciting. We cover all businesses and all technology units," she says.

What's next? Schultze isn't sure. But she's sure it will be challenging. Moreover, she points out that at a company like Allstate, which actively rotates and promotes employees from within, Y2K represented an opportunity, not a dead end. "We've learned so much and put so many processes in place that we will be able to apply to other projects," she says.

For Best Places companies, providing this kind of upward career mobility is paramount. In fact, when recruiting potential IT workers, "the first question candidates have is: What will I be working on?" says Joe Krafinski, a senior technical recruiter at Datacom Technology Group, an IT recruiting firm in New York.

Not only must the project in question involve leading-edge technologies, but "candidates are

also asking about the long-term direction of an employer's IT strategy," Krafinski says. In short, for a company to be an attractive place to work, "the technology deployed must be in step — or ahead of — the market," he says.

One reason Allstate has such an impressive retention rate (63% of employees have been there five years or more) is related to the fact that business units set the IT priorities and control the IT budgets. Because of that, IT workers know they will be working on projects of "utmost strategic importance," Pollard says.

Currently, many hot projects involve Internet, data warehousing and object technologies. For example, Allstate is rolling out a new desktop to all 7,000 field workers. Based on Windows NT, the networking capabilities of the new architecture "will allow everyone to communicate more effectively with customers," Pollard says.

The Web Is Hot

Not surprisingly, working with e-commerce initiatives — anything involving the Web, the Internet, intranets or related technologies — is seen as highly prestigious. Helen Shrader just finished leading her team at Marshall Industries in El Monte, Calif., on a strategic initiative to move electronic data interchange (EDI) functions onto the Web. "This was my first Internet project, and it was very exciting," says Shrader, EDI project manager for the electronics distribution company's Microlink project.

Microlink, which was just rolled out, provides Web-based just-in-time responses to queries from Marshall's Asian and European distributors.

During her nine years on the job,

Shrader has been given many strategic opportunities, each of which has advanced her skill base and job status. Her first assignment was to create an EDI strategy at the corporate level; this "next step" of moving to the Web "was a wonderful project for everyone in the group because we learned so much about the technology," she says.

Although most projects deemed "hot" at Best Places companies tend to involve the networked desktop, the Internet or e-commerce, other proj-

Projects considered most critical

Top Critical Project	% of Best Places
Y2K	71%
E-Commerce	44%
ERP	33%
Data Warehousing	27%
Intranets	14%

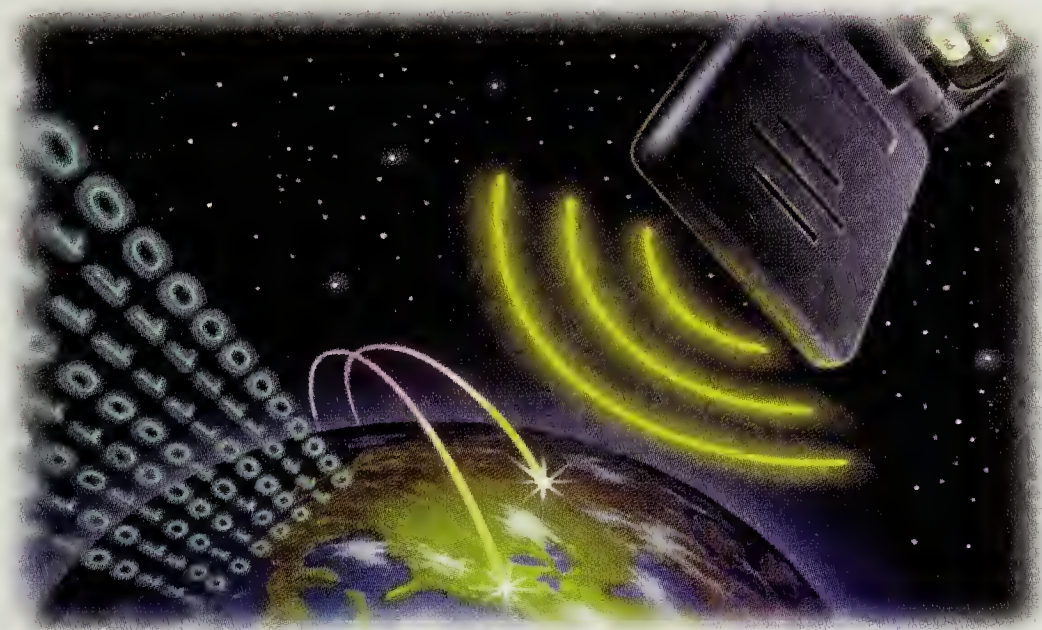
ects of strategic importance can carry elevated stature. For example, at professional services and staffing company Norrell Corp. in Atlanta, one project deemed very hot is BOSS (Brand Operation Support System) II. It involves "reinventing" the technology infrastructure that supports all field business processes.

Still, being a member of the Y2K team is seen as just as prestigious. The reason: Norrell handled the Y2K "problem" as an ongoing challenge for producing the highest quality systems possible and for establishing best practices for developing applications, says Ted Jurkuta, senior vice president and CIO at Norrell.

Thus Norrell built a software testing lab "that is now considered one of the best in our region," says Jean Grenir, vice president of IT. The automated testing environment in this lab is meant to be useful long after Y2K work is done. Rather than seeing the Y2K project as a professional dead end, IT staffers at Norrell — like their counterparts at Allstate

Continued on page 32

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hot projects

Continued from page 30

— have clamored to be on the team. “It’s obvious that on the other side of Y2K there are very exciting e-commerce and data mart projects that will exploit what we’ve learned building the lab,” Grenir says.

For example, the BOSS II project, which incorporates a complex web of Internet- and intranet-based applications with legacy systems, also solves another problem. The original BOSS wasn’t Y2K-compliant, so Norrell seized the opportunity to not only fix the Y2K bug, but also incorporate exciting new technologies into the system. IT workers involved in BOSS II are therefore on the cutting edge of Unix, Windows, WAN and Web technologies, Grenir says.

McDonald’s Corp. in Oak Brook, Ill., also proves it doesn’t take the Web to serve up a hot project. At the

fast-food giant, IT projects are driven by business urgency. As a result, the challenges are often much more than technical. McDonald’s has embarked on a highly publicized “Made for You” campaign in which customer meals aren’t assembled until ordered.

Although largely a business process change, all point-of-sale systems, kitchen systems and inventory management systems needed to be upgraded and integrated, and the members of that particular IT team “are doing something that is very prominently visible to the world,” says Dave Weick, vice president of IS.

Management Move

Being visible in the company is something Enolia Foti found out about when she joined Corning Inc. in Corning, N.Y., nine years ago as a senior systems analyst for the data network team. Coming from a net-

working background, her work involved systems analysis and design.

“Then,” she says, “I had to make a key career decision: whether to continue in a technical track or move into management.”

After deciding she wanted to go into management, Foti in successive years was rotated to roles within different Corning organizations: from project leader within Corning’s Material Technology Business to a manager within Corning’s corporate global architecture planning team to her current position as IT department head of the Erwin Manufacturing Plant in Corning’s Environmental Products Division. Foti marvels at the opportunities she’s had.

“I’ve been provided with training, with career planning and with the chance to explore various options,” Foti says.

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tives, more important than specific technical skills is attitude when deciding who gets to work on a hot project. And not surprisingly, competition to work on a hot project is often fierce. That's the case at Marshall Industries' newly launched Education News and Entertainment Network, which provides real-time technical training, product announcements and marketing presentations through Internet broadcasting to employees and associates around the globe.

Though SAP, Oracle and e-commerce experience is needed to get one of the sought-after spots on this and other projects, Leo Yu, Marshall's director of infrastructure, also looks for the right mix of personalities that will make a team productive.

At McDonald's, "communication and attitude" are key to joining a hot project, Weick says. "We're always looking for basic technological and problem-solving skills. But we want

the right attitude. And that attitude is: 'We will get this job done.' "

The stress level can be very high on important projects, but because of the professional development benefits, IT employees are usually eager to jump on board.

Just Desserts

And the rewards can be substantial, too. Foti was given the opportunity to design the IT infrastructure for a factory being constructed in Charleston, S.C. That meant commuting from upstate New York for 11 months and an exhausting and stressful schedule, "but I felt very lucky to be given the opportunity," she says.

And there can be some fun involved. Some CIOs believe that the IT department that plays together has a better chance of staying together. Which is why Norrell's Jurkuta goes bowling every Wednesday afternoon,

and there's an open invitation for any IT worker to come along. And why Weick rewarded the Y2K team at McDonald's with a three-day weekend at a spa that included golf, massages, sauna — the works.

"It's important to create an environment so that when people wake up in the morning, they actually want to come to work," Jurkuta says.

Just ask Mitch Calandar. At a time when even a two-year employment tenure makes you an IT old-timer, Calandar's 22 years at Allstate verges on legendary. Now a senior planning consultant at the firm, Calandar still looks forward to coming into work every day. "I've never thought, 'Oh, no, I have to get up and go to work.' " And the primary reason for that, Calandar says, is the constant technological challenge. ▶

LaPlante is a freelance writer in Woodside, Calif. Contact her at alaplante@aol.com.

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All for One

The best way to give IT employees a sense of involvement and contribution is to team them up with folks from other departments

BY HOLLY HUBBARD PRESTON

Steven Bandrowczak has a big issue with information technology staffers who don't know how to mingle beyond their own department. That kind of "us and them" mentality is not only antisocial, but also self-defeating, says Bandrowczak, Avnet Inc.'s CIO.

To counter that attitude, Bandrowczak will send Avnet programmers and marketing executives out on trail rides together. He sometimes teams network administrators with sales managers for a night of bowling. And once a month, he hosts "Breakfast with Steve," where he briefs IT staffers on important non-IT business issues at the Phoenix-based company.

When it comes to making sure his staff is clear on company direction, Bandrowczak leaves nothing to chance.

Anything "to try and get a sense of commonality" between the electronic distribution and material management company's many separate business divisions, Bandrowczak says. The payoff: better communication, productivity and morale for his staff and the rest of the company.

The "us and them" mentality Bandrowczak is challenging at Avnet is hardly an anomaly in corporate America. IT professionals and their managers often find themselves re-

gated to their own, somewhat isolated corner of the corporation, waiting to be called on when in-house technology goes wrong or upgrades are required. The result: IT staffers are often dissatisfied with their jobs.

That's exactly what Questar, a full-service research and consulting company, found. The Eagan, Minn.-based research firm specializes in employee and organizational behavior and recently analyzed how its own employees from different departments communicate with one another.

"When Questar employees [from outside IT] talk to our IT support

have in common is they actively push cross-divisional team-building.

Cross-divisional teams, as defined by those companies' CIOs, could involve activities ranging from exercises designed to mix staff and managers from different divisions to the formation of teams of employees from different units who work together on IT deployments. These CIOs see team-building as a way to eliminate communication gaps.

On average, 61% of employees at the companies on this year's Best Places list work in cross-functional teams with business staff.

How do the employees feel about it? For them, team-building can result in greater job satisfaction, a more exciting career path and a greater sense of purpose.

"If team-building can help me get to know the people I'm supposed to serve better,

that is better for me. It increases my value within the organization and puts me on a better, more diverse career path," says Casey Zandbergen, a senior information systems manager at AirGas.

When Zandbergen first came to the Radnor, Pa., industrial and medical gas distributor, he knew little about the company's non-IT-related business. Not anymore.

Through the cross-divisional field project management approach estab-

Most Best Places' IT staffers
work in cross-functional
teams with business staff.

staff, which is on a pretty regular basis, it is usually with a sense of urgency because something has gone wrong," says Jennifer Mattocks, a Questar consultant. These exchanges, Mattocks has found, tend to be "more negative" and less empathetic than interactions between employees in other departments.

That isn't the case at Avnet, AirGas Inc. or Solectron Corp., all deemed Best Places to Work. In fact, the one thing all three companies

lished by AirGas CIO Sandy Goldstein two and a half years ago, Zandbergen says he's received a crash course in Business 101.

Under Goldstein's tutelage, AirGas instituted an "externship" program where IT staffers and managers are assigned to work in divisions outside of their own for several weeks a year. To further facilitate communication, AirGas has invested in a videoconferencing network based on Microsoft NetMeeting, which enables IT and non-IT project associates to communicate with one another from their home or field sales offices.

"I've seen a lot of my friends working in other IT departments become pigeon-holed, working on the same types of projects with the same people," Zandbergen says. "Not me. I have a lot of understanding of business processes, not just IT business processes."

It's exactly that kind of broader business process understanding that Ken Ouchi, vice president and CIO at Milpitas, Calif.-based Solectron, wants for his IT staff.

Solectron provides manufacturing services to resellers in the electronics and computer industry. With 23 sites around the globe and multiple business units, Ouchi says he knew it would be difficult to keep his 350-person IT staff on the same page as the rest of the companies' 30,000 or so employees. "We are growing so fast, bringing in so much new technology. This could be a real frustrating job if you didn't understand

what it was all for," he says.

For that reason, before Solectron launches a new technology initiative, it pulls together a team of IT and non-IT professionals from its different business units and gets them all in a classroom together for one week. That way, they not only have a streamlined introduction to the technology, but also clear expectations about what each team member can expect from one another. After that, team members will be able to stay in

SAP AG business management solution across its Asian operations, including several recently acquired operations. To prepare for the rollout, Bandrowczak assembled teams of IT project managers — along with warehouse managers, marketing executives and field sales representatives from Avnet's Asian and U.S. offices. The teams went through product debriefings, simulations and strategy sessions in preparation for the deployment.

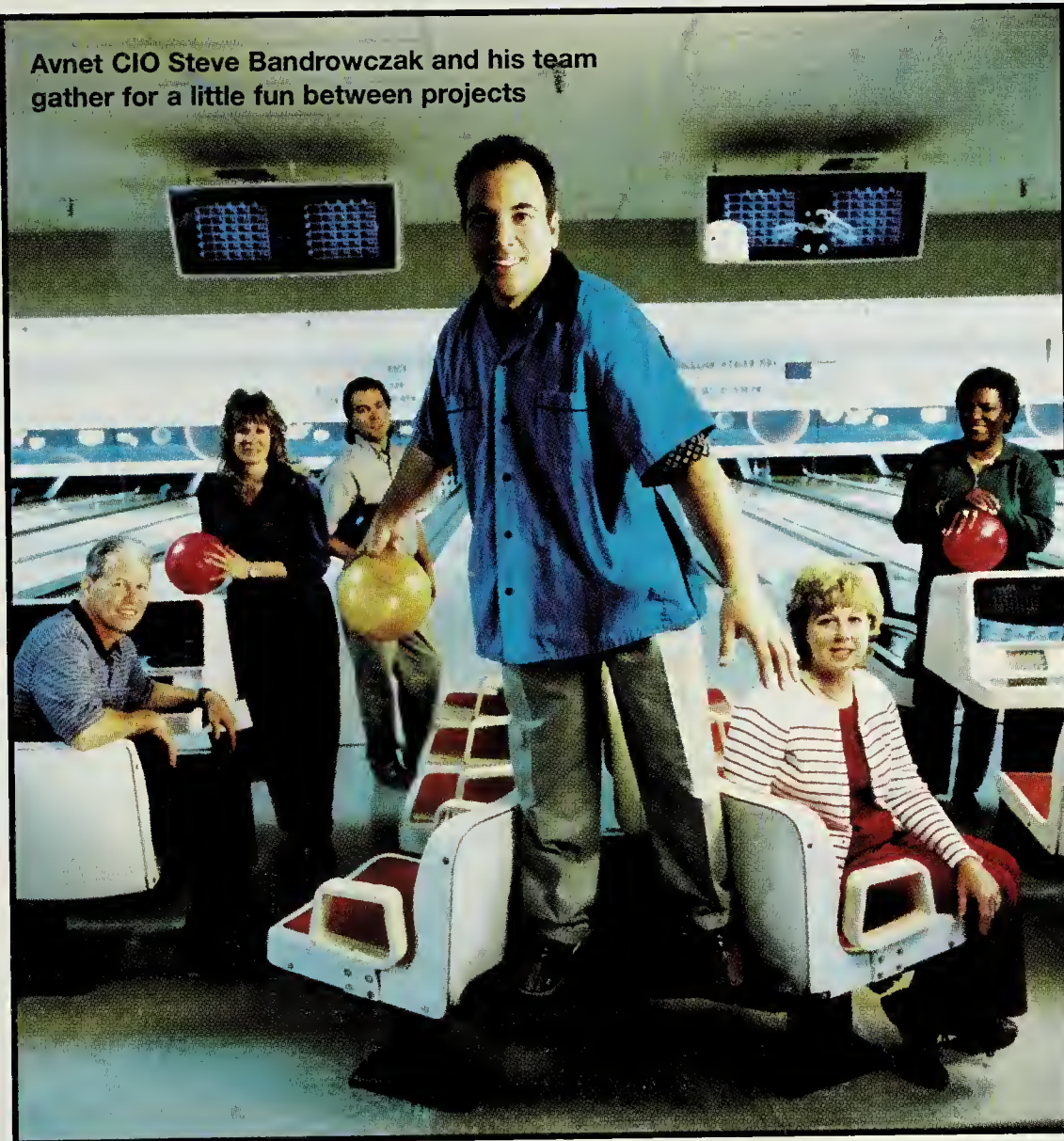
Steve Hannah, a former Avnet sales manager turned IT project director, has been overseeing the rollout from his office in Sydney, Australia. He says he believes that Avnet's push for preproject team-building made all the difference in the world when it came time for the rollout. The team just hit its first milestone on time and without a flaw.

Not one of these CIOs will tell you it's easy creating or maintaining a team-oriented environment among IT professionals and their non-IT colleagues. But they

all say it's worthwhile. Bandrowczak says a CIO can't expect his IT staff to be able to work through a technology deployment until they understand the "various and different values of the people they support." That, he says, takes time.

But the returns from team-building — improved productivity and staff morale — more than compensate for the time they add to deployment. ▸

Avnet CIO Steve Bandrowczak and his team gather for a little fun between projects



touch via the videoconferencing system, e-mail and telephone.

Avnet is a multinational company that does both plain-vanilla electronics distribution as well as more complicated OEM supply-chain management. The company has been averaging six to eight acquisitions per year around the globe. The pressure to integrate newly acquired operations into Avnet's fast-growing sales and marketing operation is tremendous.

During the past six months, Avnet has been rolling out a complex

Preston is a freelance writer in St. Helena, Calif. Contact her at hhpreston@compuserve.com

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Rich Rewards

There's no doubt about it: Information technology workers are getting spoiled. And they're loving every minute of it.

Compensation packages are getting bigger and better — and not just in traditional ways. In an effort to recruit and retain the cream of the IT crop, Best Places companies are building bonus incentives, stock options and professional development programs into employee packages.

Those incentives are joining less-formal measures to make workers' daily lives more rewarding. Today's IT staffers are kicking back at golf outings, pizza parties and awards ceremonies. Flex-time and telecommuting are helping them balance their work and personal lives. And rewards are taking the form of everything from cash bonuses to Beanie Babies.

The employer's goal? To attract top IT professionals and motivate them to perform and stay put when the competition comes calling. In fact, many Best Places companies have hired IT-specific human resources directors to be sure they're staying competitive.

Companies are willing to be generous to woo competitive talent. But being recognized even in small ways for a job well done "makes all the difference," says Jennie Jones, a senior systems analyst at Amgen Inc. in

Thousand Oaks, Calif. Jones admits that she didn't even know what a stock option was until she joined the pharmaceutical company six months ago. Since then, she's seen Amgen's stock double and split. She's been to Disneyland and a local resort with her co-workers. Jones says she and her team receive "a whole list of thank-you's and 'attaboys' that make you feel you are the company's most important asset" (see story, page 40).

Indeed, compensation is defined by much more than a steady paycheck: Base salary accounts for about two-thirds of total compensation at Best Places companies. Nearly 12% of pay is now derived from bonuses; benefits account for close to 24%. Benefits include medical, life and disability insurance packages, which are starting to extend to spousal equivalents. Retirement savings such as 401(k) plans are becoming the status quo, and employers are beginning to match funds or make contributions based on company performance to pump up that benefit.

The variety of benefits gives companies the flexibility to get creative in their reward policies. For example,



Daniel Baxter

Lowell, Ark.-based J. B. Hunt Transport Services Inc.'s average increase in total IT compensation for 1998 jumped to 17% from an average increase of 7.5% in 1997. That's because the company added the IT team to its list of positions eligible for a yearly performance bonus.

On top of cash, the strategies employed by companies have become, well, Pavlovian: Employers have figured out that creative pats on the

Continued on page 38

It just keeps getting better: In a buyer's market, compensation packages are growing fat — and fun — as Best Places companies work to attract and keep IT talent **BY JOANIE WEXLER**

compensation

Continued from page 37

back for top-quality work are almost as valuable as big financial incentives. And the pats don't have to cost much: Dinners on the company and trinkets presented in front of one's peers are going a long way toward maintaining employee enthusiasm. In addition, compensation in forms other than salary give employers some added mileage with limited budgets.

Still, competition has raised the bar for standard compensation packages, too.

Computerworld's 100 Best Places companies say they saw an average increase in total IT compensation of more than 10% last year — considerably higher than the more traditional 4% average salary increase found in *Computerworld's* 1998 Annual Salary Survey.

Best Places companies say they keep a sharp eye on salary surveys and the compensation activities of companies in similar markets. They report that they continually adjust their compensation plans to meet or beat those of other employers.

Such is the case at J. B. Hunt. "We aim to be the top-paying company in IT in our area," says Kay Palmer, senior vice president of the software development group. She says her company must vie for top



resources with local IT heavyweights Wal-Mart Stores Inc. — another Best Places winner — and Tyson Foods Inc. J. B. Hunt also strives to remain competitive with nearby Kansas City, Mo., and Oklahoma City pay scales.

At Amgen, employees are eligible for cash bonuses equal to a percentage of their salary if the organization meets its annual financial goals, says

Steven Wecker, Amgen's associate director of human resources, who directs the company's compensation policies. "All employees are also eligible for merit increases and bonuses issued as shares of stock in the company. You could think of our compensation package as traditional but generous," he says.

Best Places IT employees say their performance goals are clearly defined and pay raises are determined by fairly identifiable metrics such as hitting a percentage of on-time installations, saving the company money and becoming proficient in a new skill. In addition to the manager's assessment of the employee, peer reviews, customer evaluations and self-evaluations also enter into the mix at some companies.

At J. B. Hunt, for example, internal customers rate their satisfaction with a completed project, such as the implementation of a new business

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application. "Does the application do what the customer wanted it to do? Is it easy to use? Was it up and running on time?" says Don Crowley, an IT consultant. The responses are averaged into a scorecard that rates the project and figures heavily in twice-yearly salary reviews.

Like Amgen, many companies offer a companywide bonus plan that rewards employees if the company hits its performance goals. Many IT organizations have also instituted team bonuses on a per-project basis.

For example, Limited Technology Services (LTS), the newly-formed IT arm of The Limited Inc., has a year 2000 compensation package. It's structured to motivate and reward IT associates for completing Y2K conversions on time and within budget. For each deadline met, all IT associates

working on Y2K projects receive a bonus based on a percentage of their salary. Come July, when the final deadline arrives, if all deadlines have been met successfully, the IT associates will be rewarded with the same percentage of their salary a second time.

"We were all pretty amazed by this program," says Tracey Collins, a

be offering incentives around every corner. The Limited pays a whopping \$3,000 bonus for IT employee referrals. It also ponies up \$1,000 toward a home computer for employees. "That's a pretty big deal," Collins says.

J. B. Hunt has some impromptu IT team bonuses, which tend to arrive in the form of comp time spent golfing, canoeing or rafting due to the bucolic setting in Lowell, Ark.

The company also realizes that

it must have a handsome relocation program to attract workers from the dazzle of bigger cities to the countryside.

In addition to moving expenses, relocating workers receive a lump sum equal to a month's salary as well as temporary living expenses for 30


Continued on page 41

Best Places companies increased total IT compensation an average of 10% last year.

point-of-sale analyst at LTS. "We've met all our milestones so far."

Such programs are helping LTS President and CIO Jon Ricker retain employees. "We've managed to cut attrition in half during a time when recruiting is at an all-time high," he says (see story, page 44).

Best Places companies appear to



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The Power of Tchotchkes

Jeff Ketelhut concedes that he sometimes acts like a big kid. But that's OK with his staff, who are having a ball with the toys he hands out as motivational rewards.

Ketelhut, associate director of the global supply chain at Amgen Inc., has discovered the strong motivational power of tchotchkes — cheap trinkets that are oddly irresistible to even the most sophisticated of adults. Ketelhut is practically building a career out of rewarding staff with inexpensive, but meaningful reminders of a

job well-done.

Ketelhut's staff has come to compete in earnest for Smoochy the Frog and the company's year 2000 mascot, the Millennium Bear — both Beanie Babies. The Beanies join the likes of puzzles, beer steins, T-shirts and scratch lottery tickets as rewards with inspirational staying power.

But the most cherished goal of all is the department's "spinning pyra-

mid" award: an object that displays a rich whirl of colors as it twirls like a top. The spinning pyramid is bestowed upon a worker who has figured out how to save the company time or money.

Amgen's Jeff Ketelhut, pictured here with the toys he hands out for jobs well-done



Alan Levenson

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"I'm getting more mileage out of a \$7.50 spinning pyramid than 100-share spot stock awards," he says. "I think it is because it is a tangible, everyday reminder to the employee that he or she is appreciated."

Ketelhut says part of the appeal is that awards are handed out amid a bit of memorable fanfare. In fact, new this year is the "Cutting Edge Awards," a mock Academy Awards ceremony that took place in March. While the award — a mobile in the form of a person on a tightrope — doesn't hold the monetary value of the famous bronze statuettes, the thought is the same.

The informal awards won't build up anyone's retirement account, but they're appreciated nonetheless. "On a scale of 1 to 10, the way Jeff recognizes performance is a 10," says Jennie Jones, a senior systems analyst — and spinning-pyramid owner.

— Joanie Wexler

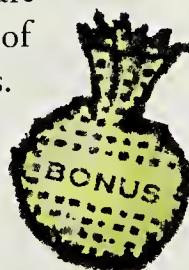
Continued from page 39

days, says Alex Mirinoff, IT personnel manager at the company.

Most IT managers' budgets have been padded for spot awards or informal recognition of the employee who has creatively squeezed time and costs out of an IT project or contributed a bright idea. Some rewards take the form of movie tickets, free dinners or comp time. Overall, employers are working hard to inject a feeling of respect in IT workers' daily lives.

To make workers feel "connected," Ricker holds monthly, two-hour lunches with selected LTS associates. He also holds birthday and anniversary parties each month.

IT-specific human resources directors are helping companies make sure compensation efforts are competitive. One company reported that it recently added a morale officer to "recognize and celebrate the successes



of our staff." Another has built a "quality-of-life" committee to review measures for further improving employees' work/life balance.

Workers are appreciative. When asked what he found to be the most attractive element of his employment at J. B. Hunt, Crowley — who's been at the company for 11 years — didn't mention money. He called it a tie between the fact that "my ideas

count" and his employer cheerfully helps him meet his skill development goals with training. At the end of the day, managers have learned that most employees prefer to spend their time on

Earth not only surviving, but thriving. That most employees work to live is a fact of life. But there's nothing wrong with having a little fun in the process. ▸

Wexler is a freelance writer and editor in Campbell, Calif. Contact her at joanie@jwexler.com.

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Food, Fun and Fame

BY CHERYL GERBER

They rode paddle-wheel boats up and down the Mississippi River, played music, performed skits and ate hearty along the way. No, this wasn't Huck Finn, Currier and Ives or 1865.

These were the Musicland Stores Corp. employees in the summer of 1998.

Musicland has a summer event every year and the Mississippi River paddle-wheel boats are a recurring

on the job

favorite. At Christmas, there's another event. Last year's party featured Big Bad Voodoo Daddy, a swing and Cajun band.

Then there's what Musicland people call The Box Lunch — when recording artists come to perform in the cafeteria for 20 to 30 minutes and sign CDs. There's no telling who's going to show up. Once, it was Garth Brooks. Another time, it was blues sensation Jonny Lang.

Musicland employees love those events. "They build morale and a company team atmosphere," says Kim Dockry, Musicland director of systems development in St. Louis Park, Minn. ▶

Gerber is a freelance writer in Kingston, N.Y.

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Doing Lunch with the Rich and Famous

BY FAWN FITTER

Even though Eden Prairie, Minn., is a long, cold way from Hollywood, employees at the headquarters of Best Buy Inc. have gotten used to seeing stars. The consumer electronics retail giant is the single largest seller of music CDs in the U.S. — bigger than

any of the music-only superstores — so it's not unusual for musical powerhouses to visit to pitch their latest recordings and discuss promotional deals.

Recent sightings have included The Artist Formerly Known As Prince, superstar Janet Jackson and new sensation Johnny Lang, who treated everyone in the corporate cafeteria to an impromptu lunchtime concert.

Also spotted: hoops hero Shaquille O'Neal, center for the Los Angeles Lakers. He showed up seeking advice on home electronics.

Best Buy employees also fraternize with a star of their own, the Best Buy mascot, Tag Man, who can be seen in the retailer's television ads. He shows up for Family Fun Night. ▶



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No Wandering Eyes

Employees at Best Places aren't looking for the next great job — they've already found it **BY ALICE LEESCH KELLY**

Elizabeth Barber, a senior network support specialist at Cox Communications Inc. in Atlanta, spent months taking classes and studying for a Cisco Certified Network Associate exam. When she found out she passed the test, she was thrilled — and rushed to work to share the good news with co-workers.

"When I came back and said I passed, they were very excited," Barber says. "It was like coming back to family and telling them I passed." Friends in her department gave Barber a pat on the back. But what really stood out for Barber is the fact that the cable company's director of MIS operations, Ray Deaton, acknowledged the achievement by treating Barber, her daughter and a friend to a lavish dinner at a local restaurant. "That meant a lot to me," Barber says.

More Than Money

At a time when annual turnover in some information technology shops is as high as 30% and filling empty positions can cost anywhere from two to five times' an employee's salary, IT managers are discovering that it takes more than just a paycheck to keep their people happy, according to Brian Anderson, vice president and general manager of the San Francisco office of Personnel Decisions International, a global management and human resources consulting firm in Minneapolis. IT managers are also finding that offering a buffet of "softer" benefits — anything from on-the-job training to days off to elegant

dinners — builds loyalty, makes work more enjoyable and nudges employees to think twice about sending off a résumé when a headhunter calls.

Turnover rates at the *Computerworld* Best Places to Work are dramatically low compared with other companies — 50% to 75% below the national average. What are the

secrets? We took a look and came up with four of the most effective ways to keep IT turnover low.

Companies with low turnover rates stress training, internal promotions and other strategies that prevent employees from growing stagnant in their jobs. For example, at Crown Central Petroleum Corp. in Balti-



James Yang

more, 80% of employees have been with the company five years or more. Crown Central spends between \$5,000 and \$10,000 per year on training for each of its IT employees. Tim Fuller, director of information systems, says it's money well spent because a well-trained employee is a happy employee.

"We train people well and keep them technologically challenged, which they like," he says.

IT employees also seem to enjoy working at companies that stay up-to-date on the latest technology. "We're on the razor's edge of every technology you can think of," Deaton says. Cox's IT shop has a 3% turnover rate.

Crown Central Petroleum's commitment to training is one of the reasons that Nancy DeMarco, year 2000 project manager, has stayed put for 21 years. "You don't have to change jobs to learn something new," she says. "I feel like I've had the complete gamut of experiences. I have touched and managed every facet of the IT business."

Phillips Petroleum Co. in Bartlesville, Okla., whose IT staff turnover is just 6%, uses "gap analysis" to compare an employee's skills with the skills his job requires. If there's a gap, the employee receives the appropriate training, says Frank Barbee, manager of IT. "We won't place people in a job without the skills because that makes them frustrated and fearful, and they may want to leave us," Barbee says. What's more, Phillips offers training in management as well as technical skills. "A lot of people think anyone can be a supervisor, but that's not true," he says.

Companies with low turnover rates also tend to provide extensive training for entry-level employees, promote from within and offer non-supervisory technical tracks in which people who don't want to be managers can still be promoted to high levels in the company. For example, at Phillips Petroleum, nonsupervisors can be promoted to a position as high as vice president.

More and more companies are

realizing that bankers' hours just don't work for many people and that allowing flexible schedules is key to employee happiness. Take Barber, for example. As a single parent, she needs flexibility. "I have certain issues that come up from time to time, and they're always very flexible with that," she says.

Getting It Done

Flexibility is built in at Phillips Petroleum, too. "My philosophy is, if you give someone a job to do, let them do it. We don't believe in micromanaging. We're very flexible as long as the work gets done," Barbee says. "We don't push the issue of 8-to-5; we push the issue that if you have a job to do, you get it done."

In companies like that, employees are often free to set their own schedules, work part time or telecommute from home. Some companies even install Integrated Services Digital Network lines in employees' homes

for fast Web connections and provide laptops for at-home work.

Indeed, companies realize that if they're going to ask an IT employee to work on weekends or pull an occasional all-nighter, they've got to give something back. At Crown Central, employees who sacrifice personal time are given comp time in return.

"Working weekends is sometimes the norm rather than the exception," Fuller says. "If I burn you out, you're going to leave. So I have to be aggressive in how I keep people motivated to keep working those hours." At Crown, long hours are rewarded with days off, cash bonuses and even weekend vacations. "I work these people to death, but I very seldom hear, 'No, I'm not going to come in this weekend,'" Fuller says.

Companies with happy IT employees offer lots of rewards. But as DeMarco says, "It's not just the dollars. It's more a matter of giving

Continued on page 46

Beyond Technical Training

Companies with low turnover rates tend to offer lots of technical training. But providing employees with the opportunity to keep up with the latest technical advances may not be enough, according to Brian Anderson, vice president and general manager of the San Francisco office of Personnel Decisions International (PDI), a global management and human resources consulting firm in Minneapolis.

In a recent study on IT turnover, PDI found that even the most technical of IT employees also want training in nontechnical areas. "Technical people realize that nontechnical development is critical in their career development," Anderson says. They want to learn how to analyze problems, manage projects, work as teams and communicate well, he says.

"Technical skills are the price of admission, but to continue to move

up and do the kind of work they want to do, receiving professional development in those other areas is very attractive," Anderson says.

But are companies giving IT employees that nontechnical training? No, Anderson says. "In our IS research, we found that 96.5% of people said it was critical — but only 41.6% are getting it," he says.

That's too bad, because such training pays off in the long run. "We found that focusing on professional development has a higher return on investment than hiring and training new employees," Anderson says. "It's got a low cost and a high return."

Most managers at Best Places companies have already figured that out. They offer plenty of nontechnical training. For example, Phillips Petroleum in Bartlesville, Okla., offers training in management as well as technical skills. ▸

retention

Continued from page 45

employees lots of responsibility and then rewarding them when they do well."

At Crown Central, employees are rewarded with stock grants, dinners, weekend vacations and cash prizes, among other things. Other companies mention star IT performers in their company newsletters, send out e-mails about noteworthy accomplishments and award prizes. "If you do a good job," Barbee says, "we want to recognize you."

And it's not just the managers doing the recognizing. At Crown Central, for example, anyone in the company can recommend anyone else for an award. For example, DeMarco recalls an IT staffer who received an award for almost singlehandedly implementing a financial application in the accounting department. Who

nominated her? Her satisfied users in the accounting department. That kind of recognition is key, Anderson says. "By having IS people recognized more by the line units they serve – that's incredibly powerful," he says.

For many IT employees, the bottom line is enjoyment. If they enjoy their job, they'll stay – and if they don't, they'll move on. That's why companies are working to build good working environments. At Phillips, for example, the company supports local cultural events and urges its employees to do the same. "We go out of our way to encourage people to get involved in the community because we believe that the more they get involved, the more likely they are to stay," Barbee says.

Open communication between employees and managers is also a plus. At Cox, Barber says she has free access to all levels of management. "This is the first company I've

worked for where you can go up to the director and talk to him about anything," she says. "You don't have all the bureaucratic levels."

Beyond that, Cox offers employees whatever might make them happy. "We moved to new facilities; everyone has state-of-the-art equipment – they get everything they want," Deaton says. "But we do a hell of a job, and we're accomplishing a lot."

At Crown Central, Fuller tries to make the workplace fun. He organizes events and promotes activities that build pride in the IT staff and give them time to let off some steam, such as family social events and department picnics, during which Fuller volunteers to man the dunking booth.

"One of my guiding principles is, Have fun," Fuller says. "We work hard, but you gotta have fun, too." ▸

Kelly is a freelance writer in Newton, Mass.

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Peter Forjusz

I Could Have Danced All Night

BY LESLIE GOFF

A black-tie dinner-dance for the employees of Lincoln Electric Co. is such an entrenched part of the corporate culture that last year, more than 1,650 people braved a winter storm in Cleveland to attend the 82nd annual event.

on the job

"The dance is part of our environment, and the attendance in the

storm is just part of the 'getting-it-done' attitude that we have," says Chuck Mehlman, Lincoln's CIO.

Last year's dance, at the Renaissance Hotel in downtown Cleveland, featured two DJs. The company's chairman and CEO, Anthony Massaro, delivered a state-of-the-union address, and more than 70 employees were recognized for 25 years of service to the company.

"It's like a prom," says Maureen Bagley, a systems architect who has been at Lincoln for nine years. "All the local tux dealers run specials, and it's really fun to see everyone all dressed up. You don't even recognize some people — especially those who work in the shop behind a welding helmet." ▸

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Relieving The Pressure

Stress is a complaint in most IT departments.

Best Places companies take some unique and fun

approaches to stress reduction **BY MARY BRANDEL**



When stress flares up, employees at Aetna cool down with a squirt-gun fight

Julie Bidwell

P

eeK inside the Best Places to Work in IT, and you'll find people singing in the hallways, dressed up like firefighters or enjoying an upper-body massage.

Shouldn't those people be working on year 2000 compliance or a new e-commerce system or something? Well, in a sense they are. Because wherever there's an information technology department, there is stress. And wherever there's a good IT department, there's plenty of stress relief.

"There's tremendous pressure today to increase speed to market," says Paul LeFort, CIO at UnitedHealth Group in Minnetonka, Minn. "You get one project done, and you don't get a chance to coast. You're on to the next one."

Combine the need for speed with fewer resources, higher turnover and fast-changing technology — not to mention things like Y2K deadlines and unexpected mergers — and you've got a real pressure cooker on your hands. So, while top companies expect and accept a certain level of stress, they're also very good at creating environments where workers can be most creative and productive.

Sometimes that means letting them know when it's time to blow off some steam. Not everyone pulls out the fire hats and water guns. But that's what Bridget Rivet, lead manager for the Y2K project office at Aetna Inc. in Hartford, Conn., did when she was preparing her team for "fire drills" — times when it would have to act quickly to satisfy an important demand. "When we have to hop-to, we pull out the supersoakers and get on with the task at hand," Rivet says. "It helps people keep things in perspective."

A good stress reduction program is a humanitarian goal — and an economic one. "Stress translates to turnover," says David Dell, research director at The Concours Group, a management consulting firm in Kingwood, Texas. "It takes a 20% or

more increase in salary to lure somebody away from a company. It takes practically nothing to get them away from a place where they are not happy."

Some stress minimizers are practically check-off items: telecommuting, flexible hours, fitness centers. Other common practices include health-related seminars, mentoring programs and casual-dress policies.

But the least stressed-out environments can be found when the employer acknowledges that stress is a factor and regularly monitors it. Unfortunately, such proactive attention is unusual. "Where most companies find out about stress is in the exit interview," Dell says.

At UnitedHealth, managers are trained to look for early signs of stress, and the company conducts stress surveys.

Questions include "When you are under stress, is there someone at work you can talk to?" and "Is

job stress affecting your health?" And perhaps most important, "Do mistakes happen because of stress on the job?" At the end of last year, 35% of workers said they were under a lot of stress, but 85% said they could talk to someone at work about it to figure out a solution.

Other companies use more intuitive measures. At St. Paul Cos., a \$9 billion property and casualty insurer in St. Paul, Minn., IT is divided into teams. "When there is stress, it's obvious to the managers," says Carol Sjowall, vice president of application development. "We have weekly management meetings, and one of the concerns is always, 'How are people doing? Is there a reasonable level of stress?'"

For the times when the answer is no, St. Paul offers employees tools to manage and perhaps avoid stress-

induced anguish. In addition to basic stress management courses, "we provide lectures on how to deal with teen-age children and aging parents, topics that cause people stress in their daily life," Sjowall says.

Also, IT employees can attend ethics classes, which are intended to decrease their agitation when they face issues such as handling confidential information and appropriate use of e-mail and the Web. "If you think about the number of situations that an IT professional winds up dealing with, many are sticky from an ethics perspective," Sjowall says.

Lectures and seminars are popular among IT employees, who say their lives are easily thrown off balance by their jobs. "I get obsessed with what I'm doing," says Andre Archambault, manager of visionary

Common stress-reduction techniques

Benefit	Best Places offering it
Flexible hours	97%
Telecommuting options	89%
Fitness center	69%

videoconferencing at UnitedHealth. For nearly three years, Archambault fought an uphill battle to get videoconferencing to be commonly used throughout the company. Now that it's taking off, so is his stress level.

"We beam into 37 cities worldwide. If there are 40 people in one room and 40 in another, and the system doesn't work, that's pretty stressful," he says. On the other hand, Archambault also has small children at home. "When you love two areas of your life, it's hard to balance them," he says.

In search of that balance, Archambault recently attended an hour-long session on stress management. As a result, he plans to take all five weeks of his vacation this year and is trying not to pick up voice-mail as much. "I'm spending more

Continued on page 50

stress

time with my kids," he says.

Such was not the case last year, when Archambault lost vacation time because he didn't take his allotted weeks. Now "I'm more sensitive to it than I was before," he says. The stress management course taught him "not to just think about doing things, but to actually do them," he says.

It's also possible to sweat off your stress. But although many companies offer fitness centers, Aetna is one of just a few to staff its gym with licensed physical fitness experts. They "work with you as far as anything you want to do with your body or mind," CIO John Brighton says. And who can beat a neck massage? Tied to the fitness center is a free upper-body massage, offered during the day, three to four days per week.

Other programs are less obviously related to stress reduction. For exam-

ple, San Francisco-based Chevron Corp.'s IT arm, Chevron Information Technology Co. in San Ramon, Calif., encourages IT workers to spend one hour per week volunteering in community programs, such as helping with school reading programs and setting up computer laboratories. "The psychology behind it is that they get out of the office and give to somebody rather than keep producing," says Greta Mayfield, a communication consultant at Chevron.

"It may sound odd from a stress-relieving perspective," says Sjewall at St. Paul, which also offers a volunteer program. "But people find such fulfillment from community involvement. From a life-enrichment perspective, it's a big deal."

Creative approaches like these are the wave of the future. In the past, stress-sensitive companies mainly focused on offering time-savers, in recognition of IT workers' long

hours. Examples include on-site services such as dry cleaners and boutiques. However, you can throw people all the conveniences in the world, but if they don't feel in charge of their own time, they will still be stressed out, says Sue Kever, president of The Kever Group, a Dallas-based human resources consulting firm. "More than anything, people want control of their time," she says.

There are lots of ways to offer that kind of control, Dell adds. "For some people, it's the freedom to see their kids in a Little League game. For others, it's a month and a half to go back to the country where their parents live. Companies need to allow that."

Indeed, empowering employees with a sense of control is a cornerstone of stress management. "The thing that reduces stress the most is giving employees clear direction and the support to get it done," LeFort

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says. That's why UnitedHealth is so strict about managing the IT workload and the scope of projects. "What we're very tight on is that once we get our projects lined up for the year, we won't put others on the plate unless we take something off," LeFort says.

That type of management oversight is key. "People need to feel that they can manage their own environment and that the likelihood of succeeding is OK," Dell says.

LeFort concurs: "When you're under a lot of stress and can't be successful, it's five times worse than not being successful." That type of control can only come to fruition through the CIO, who needs to allow the IT staff to share in decision-making.

"The way to deal with stress is for the IT department to become much more of a player in determining what the priorities of the organization are and doing the work that is important," Dell says.

Just as important, Dell says, is being clear on the project's duration and giving people a sense of progress and accomplishment until it's completed.

What stress-reduction comes down to is taking care of people along personal, professional and financial lines. And if all else fails, there's always humor.

For example, after a particularly grueling project at St. Paul, the fatigue level was very high. So the management team got together and wrote a song about all the obstacles encountered during the course of the project. The tune: *The Beverly Hillbillies'* theme song. "We gathered everyone in the hallway, and four managers sang this song. Laughter is the best stress reliever of all," Sjowall says.

It's also a good way to make



UnitedHealth CIO Paul LeFort reduces staff stress by "giving employees clear direction and support"

Mark Luinenberg

employees feel like a whole person. "You really need to come back to the sense of, 'Am I appreciated as a person? Am I going to be OK if things aren't on schedule?'" Dell says. "Companies that do not address that will have enormous turnover." ▸

Brandel is a freelance writer in Norfolk, Mass. Contact her at brandel@cwix.com.

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FROM THOUGHT TO FINISH.™



Peter Horjus

It's Party Time!

BY LESLIE GOFF

Two years ago, Harriet Edelman, Avon Products Inc.'s then interim CIO and senior vice president of global operations, gave database analyst Debra Pinon a new mandate: "Throw a holiday party."

Pinon booked a room at the Knights of Columbus lodge in nearby White Plains, hired a DJ and caterers and organized hourly gift drawings. About 200 IT staff members showed up. It was such a success,

on the job

Edelman gave Pinon the go-ahead for a spring party.

This time she found a swankier locale, the Glen Island Harbor Club on the shores of Long Island Sound in New Rochelle, N.Y. She hired a team of DJs who wore giant celebrity heads — like Frank Sinatra and Carmen Miranda — and performed skits.

And in the fall, Edelman asked Pinon to do it again. This time they had a beach party. Now the get-togethers have become annual events.

"In a rather deliberate and pulsed way, we are doing something significant of a fun, you-never-know-what-we-are-going-to-do-next nature," Edelman says. "It really goes back to the friendly spirit of Avon."



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Financial Services: Big Payoffs

There was a time when financial-services institutions — banks in particular — weren't exactly known for embracing cutting-edge technology. But with millions and, in some cases, billions of dollars at stake, they could hardly be blamed for their recalcitrance.

But more and more, financial services firms have grown reliant on technology, whether they're selling commercial cash management services or providing Internet-based banking. They're driven by the need to maintain profits as well as a growing emphasis on e-commerce. The result: Firms are pouring billions of dollars into hardware and software and, in the process, attracting an increasing number of highly talented workers.

"Technology is primary to our business — and in many cases it is our business," says Steven Sheinheit, an executive vice president at The Chase Manhattan Corp. in New York. "Many of our businesses are transaction- and information-based."

Chase, the nation's third-largest bank, last year spent \$2.6 billion, or roughly one out of every four expense dollars, on technology. Of its 73,000 employees, one in seven works in information technology.

The situation is similar at Fannie Mae, formerly the Federal National Mortgage Association, the nation's largest supplier of home mortgage funds. Approximately 1,200 of its 3,500 employees work in technology, which accounts for 20% of the Washington-based agency's spending. Those kinds of numbers, and the opportunities they provide, are attracting growing ranks of IT workers. Database managers, systems

These financial services companies are riding the technology wave and taking their employees along for a ride full of perks and training **BY TOM DUFFY**

integrators and object-oriented developers are some of the most sought-after workers at such companies. And for those without the proper background, there's often training.

Just look at Shadonna Logan. She came to Fannie Mae from Washington's Howard University after graduating in 1992 with a bachelor's degree

with little technical background. She learned the basics of Sybase and systems analysis.

Her training complete, Logan joined the development group at Fannie Mae's mortgage-backed security portfolio systems, a mission-critical operation that in February handled nearly 81,000 transactions amounting to \$78 billion.

Handling that kind of money can make work in the financial services field stressful, says Jeffrey Leon, managing director at Russell Reynolds Associates, a New York recruiting firm. "In the normal course of a day, you've got trillions of dollars of securities and cash and foreign exchange zipping around wires. And if some of that goes wrong, the cost is enormous," he says. Maybe so. But the stress doesn't seem to be getting to Logan. "It's actually very exciting," she says. "This is a hot market."

Hot, financial services firms still tend to be somewhat conservative when it comes to the work culture. "You don't see basketball hoops in the hall," says Cathy Mattax, Fannie Mae's director of corporate IS.

Still, Fannie Mae works hard to make its environment comfortable. New employees are assigned a peer mentor to help them learn everything from where to park their car to the hours of the company cafeteria.



in business administration and computer-based information systems. Upon arrival, Logan spent four months in the Business Systems Technologist program, which is primarily geared toward young workers

Workers can also be matched with a more senior corporate mentor whose purpose is to help guide their protégés' careers.

In addition, Fannie Mae conducts semiannual reviews of firms in the area to make sure its pay isn't lagging behind, Mattax says. Throughout the sector, compensation is generally seen as more than fair.

"The pay in financial services is generally better than almost anywhere in terms of cash compensation," Leon says.

Fannie Mae employees also are eligible for a forgivable loan of up to \$11,000 to cover the cost of the down payment on a house and associated closing costs, a natural benefit for a company that's in the business of encouraging home ownership.

At Chase, the environment provides a variety of opportunities for employees to work on innovative technology, says Sultan Khan, Chase's vice president of enterprise information technology architecture.

"We have a significant presence in data warehouses and data mining, a heavy focus on service centers and call centers, and we're investing very

to take advantage of a professional development program that deals with nontechnical issues such as customer service and project management.

Khan, who has been at Chase 19 years, says another benefit is that he and others are often given the opportunity to get more involved in the business side. Three years ago, Khan did a stint as a technology manager for electronic cash management solutions.

Among other things, he made product presentations to customers, established pricing for certain items and ran customer focus groups.

Khan says the experience gave him a better understanding of how business needs drive technological demands.

"Over the years, I've had such a diverse set of experiences that it's almost like I have been changing jobs the whole time," he says. ▀



heavily in e-commerce technologies," Khan says.

Chase also offers a variety of training opportunities. IT workers have access to more than 70 two- to five-day technical training courses. In addition, workers are encouraged

Duffy is a freelance writer in Northampton, Mass. Contact him at tduffy62@compuserve.com.

Retail: Minding the Store

The IT department at Best Buy Inc. is hiring at a torrid pace — 15 to 25 people per month, says Marc Gordon, senior vice president and CIO. What's more, candidates are flocking to the fast-growing consumer electronics retailer even though it's in frozen Eden Prairie, Minn., and not balmy Silicon Valley. What's the appeal?

"Even though we just hit the \$10 billion mark, we've got the fast-paced, high-growth atmosphere of a high-tech start-up," Gordon says. "It's competitive, demanding, dynamic . . . it occasionally borders on the chaotic. IS is retail's life's blood."

Information technology in retail was once a backwater of outdated systems, aging proprietary software and

Retail companies are attracting and keeping IT employees by giving them a chance to work on some of the latest, greatest technologies

BY FAWN FITTER

unchallenging work that primarily involved keeping track of inventory and pricing. The industry was slow to embrace IT as a strategic business objective. However, many retailers have become aware that they're swimming in a vast pool of data — what items sell best in which locations, where employees' skills are needed most, how to make customers return

again and again — and that using that data efficiently can increase their profits exponentially. As a result, IT is no longer a mere supporting player.

Gathering, storing and using information has taken center stage in plotting long-term retail strategy. Aggressive recruiters and hiring managers are luring IT staffers with the

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opportunity to apply hot technologies like data warehousing, e-commerce, supply-chain automation and customer-relationship management in a fiercely competitive industry, says Cathy Hotka, vice president of IT at the National Retail Federation, an industry trade group.

"Retail is one of the few industries where IT makes a difference in the bottom line. And every CEO in retail now knows the business is only as good as the IT shop," Hotka says, adding that her organization's council of prominent retail CIOs is "up front about using the opportunity to work with hot technologies to lure the best IT folks away from other industries."

Sears, Roebuck and Co. in Hoffman Estates, Ill., one of our Best Places companies, is in the forefront of the move toward using IT more dynamically. "One of our biggest projects right now is leveraging customer information," says Bill Brannen, director of workplace transformation. "We have 100 million

a data warehouse for customer information, Sears is also moving aggressively into e-commerce. It already sells tools, toys and repair parts online and is about to launch a site that allows people to research and buy appliances via the Web and connect directly with repair technicians and nearby stores.

This is an effort that lets the company's IT staff experiment with the newest tools and techniques, a hallmark of our Best Places companies.

But retail isn't an industry that invests in technology for technology's sake. "We're not racing to be the first to implement the sexiest solutions," says Amy Todd, a manager in IS logistics at The Home Depot Inc. in Atlanta. "We're doing what the business requires." Retail is, however, an industry that has vast needs for practical applications.

Home Depot, for example, is developing systems for everything from transportation and labor management to a returns/refunds system. Much of the work is done in-house, because most software vendors can't provide solutions scaled to an organization that completes 40 billion transactions per year, says Ron Griffin, senior vice president and CIO.

The industry is middle-of-the-road when it comes to salaries; as Griffin says, "Twenty-five percent of IT organizations pay a higher base salary than we do, but those are either start-ups or consulting firms."

In addition to performance-based bonuses and employee stock

purchase programs, Best Places companies tend to be generous and innovative, with flextime, job sharing, telecommuting, limits on overtime and other work/life initiatives. And, of course, most retailers offer employee discounts on their merchandise — an appealing perk for the acquisitive.

Notably, retailers want their IT staff to be familiar with not just bits and bytes, but also with the product line and end users.

That's why Home Depot requires every IT employee to work in a retail store for at least a week and why Sears' mandatory 10 days per year of IT training includes time behind the cash register.

As IT entrenches itself ever more firmly at the strategic heart of the retail business, that business knowledge will serve staffers well. Just consider Jerry Miller, Sears' vice president of information systems logistics. Thanks to his combination of technical skills and business savvy, he was recently promoted to CIO. ▀

Fitter is a freelance writer in Boston. Contact her at fsquared@netcom.com.

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Best IT Departments in Retail:

Best Buy Inc.

CDW Computer Centers Inc.

Consolidated Stores Corp.

Costco Cos.

Fingerhut Cos.

The Home Depot Inc.

The Limited Inc.

MASCO Corp.

Musicland Stores Corp.

Office Depot Inc.

Sears, Roebuck and Co.

Staples Inc.

Wal-Mart Stores Inc.

households from which to extrapolate marketing techniques, demographics and so forth." In addition to building



Brian Raszka

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High Tech: A Delicate Balance

Best Places in the technology industry may work IT employees hard, but projects are challenging and the pay is great **BY FAWN FITTER**

The pace of innovation and the demand for ever-more-powerful technology have kept the high-tech industry booming with opportunities and challenges. It's no surprise that technology firms — hardware, software, services and manufacturing — are well-represented on the 100 Best Places to Work list.

The fast-paced world of high tech requires a lot from information technology professionals. Workweeks often are 60 hours — even more when a project is in its final stages — with key employees on call around the clock. Projects are driven by the demands of clients who want applications custom-designed and flawlessly integrated with legacy systems on the tightest schedules imaginable. An acute skills shortage makes job-hopping common.

"There's more work than anybody can do," says Robert Monastero, director of human resources for information management at Xerox Corp. in Stamford, Conn.

There are two separate career paths in such companies: The internal IT support pros are focused on all the hot technologies popular in every industry: Web-based technologies, network design and infrastructure and anything related to e-commerce and knowledge management systems. On the development side, companies need research-and-development experts, software engineers, application developers, beta testers and qual-

ity control staff.

In an industry in which networks and telecommunications are completely updated every year or two and organizations are regularly reorganized, decentralized or globalized, that can mean a breakneck pace and relentless pressure. But Best Places companies make up for that pace by offering employees ample opportunity to work with talented colleagues in a team-oriented atmosphere while developing new skills — which is always a résumé-boosting plus.

"People who come to work for us can expect they'll be doing challenging, leading-edge work," says Howard L. Niden, partner in charge of systems integration practice at PricewaterhouseCoopers in New York.

Because these are the companies developing the newest technologies, it's vital that their employees be ready and able to pick up a new skill quickly. Companies on the Best Places list stress individual training plans that not only measure the skills people already have, but also determine what kind of training they'll need in the future and how they'll receive it. Each new hire at PricewaterhouseCoopers receives 12 weeks of training, with continuing education and annual

career planning meetings thereafter. And at NCR Corp. in Dayton, Ohio, documented requirements for each job provide a map for progressing in a position and for moving among positions. Salaries and promotions depend on meeting those benchmarks, says Vice President and CIO Sam Coursen.

Salaries are another lure to potential hires in this industry. Because technology firms scramble to find and keep the best and brightest, companies keep a close eye on the compensation packages offered by their direct competition and by the larger IT world. At PricewaterhouseCoopers, a recent salary survey led to raises averaging 13% to 14% to bring salaries more in line with the competition, Niden notes.

Xerox pays salaries in line with the top 20% of all IT shops, users and vendors alike, Monastero says, but the company sweetens the deal further with a benefits package that *Money* magazine dubbed one of the

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Brian Raszka

verticals

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best in the nation. In addition to their base pay, IT staffers receive stock options equal to 2% of their base salary, profit sharing of up to 10% of their salary and a bonus — based on individual, departmental and corporate performance — of 12% to 14% of their base salaries.

Benefits also include adoption assistance, child and elder care, flex-time and telecommuting, work/life balance programs and generous insurance coverage.

IT managers at Best Places companies say their staffers consider it important to be working for an IT company — not just a company with an IT department. It means their skills will be nurtured and used anywhere in the organization, whether they're creating software, building a data warehouse or automating the sales process. It also implies that

working in IT in no way prevents them from climbing the corporate ladder into management.

That's demonstrated by an NCR program that sends 40 to 60 people per year from the IT shop to work for a time in other departments while their counterparts from those departments experience what it's like to work in IT.

In fact, though IT staffers in the tech industry are seen as providing a service rather than creating a product, they're gaining influence on the business side of the industry.

"We're in a transition from office equipment to 'document management' solutions," says Gary Banks, Xerox's CIO. "Our target market has changed from the office supply buyer to the CIO . . . , [so] we're

spending time training the salesforce. There's a place for IS on Xerox's operations committee for the first time, which gives us the proverbial place at the table in strategy and business issues." ▸

Best IT Departments in High Tech:

Apple Computer Inc.
American Management Systems
Cabletron Systems Inc.
Computer Associates International Inc.
Corning Inc.
Lucent Technologies Inc.
Modis Professional Services
Norrell Corp.
NCR Corp.
PricewaterhouseCoopers
Solelectron Corp.
Unisys Corp.
Xerox Corp.

Utilities: Lighting the Way

Utility companies are entering a deregulated era that they say bodes well for their information technology employees. Competition among utilities, fueled by government deregulation of the industry, will force the firms to adopt new technologies and thus create IT job opportunities, according to IT executives.

But they concede that competition could create mergers that would cut the number of IT jobs, although Best Places to Work in the industry aren't finding that to be the case now.

Among the new technologies the utility industry is pursuing are Web-based bill payment and the integration of billing systems to handle bundled services, such as the combined billing of electricity, telephone and electronic home security services.

"The changes that are ahead for

Deregulation has Best Places to Work in the utility industry putting the focus on technology, which means bright opportunities for IT employees **BY STEVE ALEXANDER**

our industry require substantial changes in technology," says Joe Wiley, director of information systems at electric-power utility Teco Energy Inc. in Tampa, Fla. Teco sought to be more competitive by extending the functionality of its work order and work management systems. Other IT opportunities will be created by the company's pending SAP implementation project, says Merlin Wadsworth, Teco's vice president of corporate and operating service and CIO.

Michael Heim, a utilities analyst at A. G. Edwards & Sons Inc. in St. Louis, says IT is doing well in the utilities industry now but that the future is clouded. "It's true that utility computer systems are changing rapidly due to deregulation," he says. "But who knows how long that will last?"

Deregulation can also mean uncertainty for IT workers as competition forces companies to merge — something that ordinarily might mean a loss of IT jobs.

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- Q.** Are you ready to get off the plane?
- Q.** Do you want to work with really smart people?
- Q.** Do you want to own a piece of the company you're building?
- Q.** Do you want a career path instead of a corporate ladder?
- Q.** Do you want to work on interesting projects?

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But company executives at Energy Holdings Co., formerly CalEnergy Co. and MidAmerican Energy, say that won't happen there. The Des Moines, Iowa-based electric power-generating firm is a new company formed by CalEnergy's acquisition of MidAmerican Energy.

Instead, Robert Beck, corporate director of information systems at what was Omaha-based CalEnergy, predicts the IT staffs of both companies will remain the same because IT will be vital to new technology adoption. New MidAmerican Energy IT projects in the deregulated era will include e-commerce and new billing systems that allow payment for bundled services such as electricity, telephone and electronic home security, on a single utility bill. "We're going to need some pretty savvy middleware and integration people," Beck says.

That translates into opportunity, says Rick Sliva, a network engineer at MidAmerican Energy. "With deregulation, you need to build a solid infrastructure, so I think I get to do more things working here than I would someplace else. For example, there's a big push for more network management and desktop server management to limit the amount of downtime."

Wiley also says deregulation will mean new opportunities for IT peo-

ple to learn technological and business skills.

"The utility industry is the place to be now because we're going through so much change," he says. "While it sometimes can be stressful in terms of work, there is the opportunity to learn a lot."

Utilities promise training to accompany the IT initiatives deregulation will require. At Public Service Company of New Mexico, an electric and gas utility in Albuquerque, IT projects for the deregulated market include a customer information and billing system and a materials and work management system. "We're doing a lot of Oracle training and training on the applications themselves," says John Ortiz, director of IS.

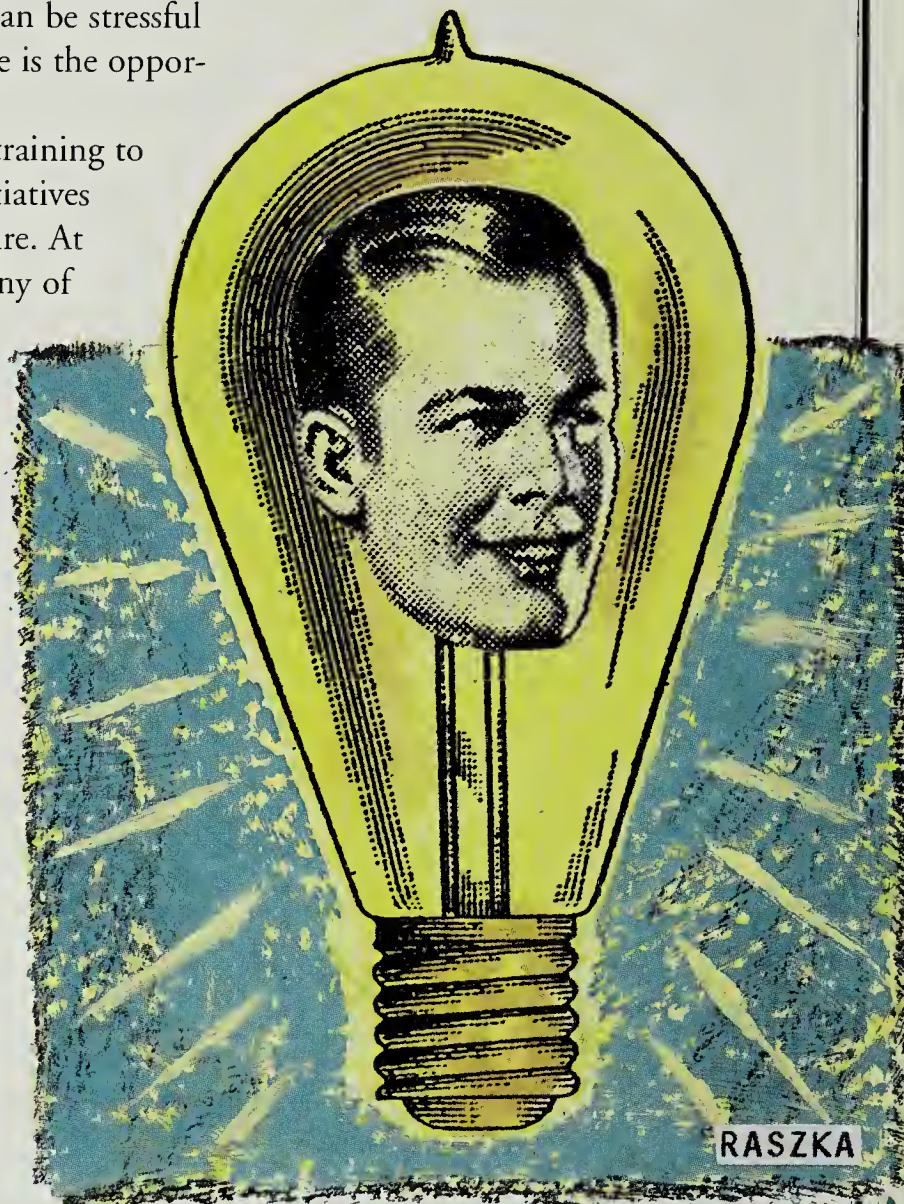
The deregulation era "is an extremely busy time for us," says Tonye Crooks, an IT team leader who heads a group of eight programmers at Public Service. Her team will be doing more Web development, which will allow utility customers to review and pay their bills online.

Utility executives agree that their industry is known for salaries that fall around the middle of the IT compensation scale. Wiley says Teco tries to compensate for its midrange salaries by offering telecommuting (used by approximately 15% of the IT workforce), flexible work hours and bonus programs that let IT people earn up to 10% of salary in addition to their annual base pay.

In addition, Teco recently revised the salaries of approximately 12% of existing IT workers, giving them

raises of 5% to 15%. Public Service raised salaries by 4% to 30% for approximately 40% of the IT staff.

Besides pay, another utility industry benefit is fairly regular



Brian Raszka

Best IT Departments in Utilities:

Dynegy Inc.

Edison International

KeySpan Energy Corp.

MidAmerican Energy Holdings Co.

Northern States Power Co.

Peoples Energy Corp.

PG&E Corp.

Public Service Co. of New Mexico

Teco Energy Inc.

Wisconsin Energy Corp.

hours. Though the utility firm operates 24 hours per day, few IT people are called to work nights or weekends, Wiley says. "Our IT people usually work between the hours of 7 a.m. and 6 p.m., and most leave for the day at 4 or 4:30 p.m.," he says.

Crooks agrees. "When everything is going good, you work about 44 hours a week, which is not bad. We also don't work a lot of weekends."

What the utility industry doesn't offer is a place for specialists, Wiley says. "If you only want to work on one aspect of Oracle, this is not the place for you," he says. "But if you want to work on Oracle, Sybase and DB2 and understand the intricacies of integrating them, this is the place for you." ■

Alexander is a freelance writer in Edina, Minn. Contact him at s_j_alexander@rocketmail.com.

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Peter Horjus

Playing the Part

BY FAWN FITTER

The information technology folks at The Home Depot Inc.'s Atlanta headquarters really get into the Halloween spirit. Every year, members of the department dress up in wacky costumes, decorate their cubicles and stock up on sweets in order to host a party for kids from inner-city schools, who might not otherwise have a chance to go trick-or-treating safely.

on the job

But the real fun is for the

adults. In recent years, the IT staff has developed a tradition of putting on a Halloween play, complete with over-the-top action and fake gore. In true "Hey, kids, let's put on a show" custom, they write the script, make the props, provide the costumes and rehearse on their own time before presenting three or four performances to their colleagues in the course of a week.

Last year's production, the biggest hit so far, was a comedic thriller dubbed "Delilah's Dead-End Drive-In."

"It's hysterical to see the people you work with in a day-to-day role up on stage," says Amy Todd, a manager in the logistics IT department. "People you'd never imagine would do it get up and dance around." ▸

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For immediate consideration, send your resume, Attn: NCWo601A/CM and position of interest via email: resumes-sps@sun.com (plain text only, no attachments please) or fax to : (703) 208-5733.

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